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THE WOODEN BRIDGE.

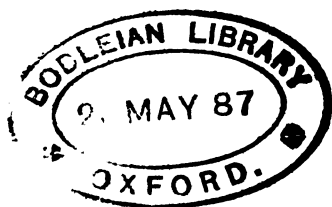
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THE
BROTHER AND SISTER;
OR,
THE WAY OF PEACE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF
"GRACE DERMOTT; OR, HELP FOR THE AFFLICTED,
ETC. ETC.

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THE
BROTHER AND SISTER;
OR,
THE WAY OF PEACE.

CHAPTER I.

"I CANNOT think what ails you to-day, Willie," exclaimed his little sister, as she gazed, with a mingled expression of wonder and impatience, into the thoughtful countenance of her companion, whose attention, for the last few minutes, she had been in vain endeavouring to attract. "Are you not well?"

"Yes, quite well, Martha dear," replied the boy, rousing himself, and trying to look cheerful. "What is it you want? Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Tell me what you were thinking of just now, that made you look so sad; and why the tears keep on coming into your eyes. There, you are crying again. I thought boys never cried. Come, tell me; tell me directly, like a dear, good brother," added the child, in a gentler tone.

"Time enough, Martha, darling."

"But I will know."

"Hush, you must not say *will*."

"Well then, please, dear Willie;" and the little girl shook back her long curls, and raised her eyes beseechingly to his.

"I would rather not tell you," said Willie; "so do not think any more about it. And now I am ready to play, or do anything you like, and will promise not to cry, or look sad again—if I can help it, that is. Shall I try and find you some blackberries?"

"No," answered his little sister, sullenly. "I hate blackberries, and I do not want to play."

She walked on in silence, and Willie after her. They crossed the green fields, and followed the windings of the clear bright stream, with the blue sky over head, and the wild flowers growing all around; but a shadow, the shadow of an angry spirit, rested upon everything, so that they had no beauty for Martha. The real shadows of death and change were even then gathering in the distance, and the time coming when she would look back upon the happy days of her childhood, with tears and vain regret that she had not been more happy in them, and thankful for them. We should never make troubles; they are sure to come soon enough. What God sends, he will help us to bear; but it grieves him to see the dark clouds

which so frequently arise from our own fretful and impatient tempers. When Martha reached the end of the little wooden bridge, which brought them nearly home, she paused, and waited until her brother came up to her.

"Well," said she, "are you going to tell me, or not?"

"Not now, Martha dear. Some other time, perhaps," answered Willie. It pained him to deny anything to the little sister whom he so tenderly loved, but he could not bear to impart to her the sad fear which had been gradually becoming a certainty in his own mind. "She will know soon enough," thought he.

"Never mind," said Martha. "I will ask mother, and she will make you tell."

"Oh, Martha," exclaimed Willie, seizing her hand to prevent her from passing; "pray do not say anything to mother about it."

"Why not?"

"Because—because she is not so strong as she was, and the least thing agitates and makes her ill."

A sudden light flashed across the mind of his sister, as he spoke.

"Willie," said she, "I now know what made you look so sad. You were thinking of poor mother, and would not tell me for fear of grieving me."

Willie sat down on the wooden bridge, and burst into tears.

"Is she very ill, then? Will she die?" asked his sister, clinging to him; for young as she was, she clearly knew the sad meaning of the word *death*.

"I hope not, Martha; but we must be very careful of her; and do all we can to spare her the slightest trouble or anxiety."

"Oh, yes; we will do everything. Don't cry, Willie."

"I bore it as long as I could," sobbed the boy. "Oh, mother! mother!"

Martha stood by him, pale and trembling, and not knowing what to say. She was very sorry now that she had been so sullen and ill-tempered, but Willie had forgotten all about it: he was thinking of other things, and when she put her hand upon his shoulder, and asked him to forgive her, he looked up, and kissed her as affectionately as if nothing had happened.

Before they went in doors, Willie knelt down and bathed his face in the clear cold stream, that his mother might not perceive that he had been crying. Martha, as she watched him, noticed that he remained longer than there was any need, with his eyes raised to heaven, and his lips moving fast, as if praying; after which he arose, and came towards her with his own sweet and cheerful smile.

"I wish I were like you, Willie," whispered his little sister, gently.

"Like me! I am sure you do not wish any such thing." And drawing her forward a few steps, they saw their own forms reflected side by side in the bright water, Willie's frank, honest, but singularly plain face, rendered still plainer by a large scar across the forehead, being very observable, as he slightly pointed to it.

"I did not mean that," said Martha, turning away.

"Never mind what you meant, now. Here is father returned from work." The children sprang forward to meet him, and they all three entered the cottage together.

Mrs. Owen was sitting at needlework by the fire-side, and notwithstanding the warm sunshine without, she shivered every now and then with the feeling of cold. Although it was still early in the autumn, the fire was not unwelcome; it had a cheerful look, and so had the little tea-table, covered with a white cloth, and nice brown bread, and cakes of her own making, of which her husband was particularly fond. Mr. Owen glanced with a satisfied air around his comfortable home, and then asked her kindly how she felt, and hoped that she had not been overworking herself.

"Oh, no," replied his wife, cheerfully. "I feel stronger to-day, thank God."

“Thank God,” echoed Willie. And even little Martha, as she sat down in her accustomed place at her mother’s feet, and laid her head in her lap, murmured, “Thank God.”

Martha did not sit still, as usual, and let her mother wait upon her, but watched to see what she could do to save her trouble ; and was so active and helpful, that her father noticed it, and commended her for it. His praise, and her mother’s gentle approving smile, were very sweet to Martha, and she determined to try and deserve them more than she had hitherto done. Many were the good resolutions which she made that night. But after all, Martha was only a poor, sinful child ; and, as she forgot to ask God to help her to keep them, it was no wonder that they were soon broken.

CHAPTER II.

MR. and Mrs. Owen had passed through many hardships together early in life, and it served to make them more thankful for the comforts which, by the blessing of God upon their own industry, they now enjoyed. Even little Martha could remember the time when her mother used to go out to needlework at

a gentleman's house about a mile off, on which occasions she and Willie were always left alone until her return, with no fire, lest they should go near it and get burned. Those were long and dreary days. Martha soon grew tired of standing at the window, looking at the clouds and trees—for there was nothing else to look at, few people ever passing that lonely cottage; or listening to her brother repeating the hymns which he had learned at the Sunday school. Sometimes she would cry with the cold, or fall asleep, wrapped in Willie's jacket, and wake quite rejoiced to find it was so late.

Willie never complained of the cold. He used to tell her that boys did not feel it so much as girls. When she did not want him to play with her, he would sit for hours poring over his spelling-book, but was always ready to put it aside in a moment at the murmuring voice of his impatient little sister. They were glad when it grew dusk, for then their mother came back with her cheerful smile and loving words; and she soon made the fire leap up merrily on the hearth, and hung on the kettle, and bustled about to have everything bright and comfortable against her husband's return. "He will be so tired," she used to say; but she never thought of herself. When tea was over, Mr. Owen heard Willie say his lessons; while Martha sat at her mother's feet, with her

head resting against her knees, and forgot all her little troubles.

The children fared better in the warm weather, for they could play about the green fields, and gather flowers, and listen to the singing of the birds. Sometimes Willie took his sister with him blackberrying or nutting. Many a merry day they had together in the old woods. When Martha grew tired, he used to carry her in his arms, for he was a strong boy, and so thoughtful and steady, that his mother never feared to trust her with him.

One day—Martha never forgot that day—they came, in the course of their rambles, to a high bank, or wall, said to be the remains of an old Roman fortification, of which there were many traces in the neighbourhood. Growing on the edge of the wall was a cluster of small crimson flowers, such as the children never remembered having seen before. Martha asked her brother to get them for her, but the wall was high, and almost perpendicular; and after several vain attempts, he gave it up in despair. Martha was disappointed, for she had set her heart upon having them to carry home to her mother.

“Never mind,” said Willie, “I dare say there are more further on, where the wall is lower, and where they can be easier gathered.”



THE OLD WALL.

"I dare say not," replied the wilful Martha. "I want these. The bank does not look so very high; and even if it is, there is plenty of ivy to take hold of. I do think I could gather them myself. I am sure I could, in a moment, if I was a great boy like you."

Willie laughed good-naturedly, and consented to try again. He took hold of the ivy and creeping plants, and drew himself gradually up, until his hand touched the bright crimson flowers. Martha shouted for joy; but at the moment, a part of the old wall gave way, and Willie fell at her feet bleeding and insensible, but still grasping the flowers in his hand. Martha's wild screams attracted the attention of an old man, who was picking sticks in the wood. When he saw what had happened, and the blood flowing from poor Willie's forehead, he bound it lightly with his handkerchief, and taking the boy in his arms, carried him home to his mother's cottage, desiring Martha to lead the way.

"How did it happen?" asked the old man, as they went along.

"I did it," answered Martha. "It was all my fault. I have killed him."

"Poor child," said her companion kindly, "you are frightened, and do not know what you say."

It was a terrible sight for Mrs. Owen, to

have her boy brought home thus, pale and bleeding, and apparently dead. But she neither screamed nor fainted ; and when she had washed away the blood from his face, and bound up the deep gash across his brow, he opened his eyes, and tried to smile.

"It is nothing," murmured he. "Do not be frightened, mother."

"I am not frightened, my son. I see it is only a bad cut. It will soon be well, if you keep still," And she bent over and kissed him tenderly, but calmly, for she knew how much depended upon his being kept perfectly calm and quiet.

"Where is Martha?" asked Willie, looking round as well as he could.

Mrs. Owen lifted her upon the bed beside him.

"Don't cry, dear," whispered her brother. "I shall soon be better. It does not pain me much. Here—I am sorry your flowers are broken, but they will revive if you put them in water."

Martha threw them from her, and burst into a passionate flood of tears. Mrs. Owen carried her into the next room, and tried to soothe her. She partly guessed the truth ; but nothing was said at that time. Poor Martha was sufficiently punished for her wilfulness.

Willie remained ill for several weeks from the effects of the fall ; and although the

wound in his forehead healed more rapidly than could have been expected, the scar, the doctor told Mrs. Owen, would remain for life.

One day, when Willie was well enough to be left, Mrs. Owen took her little daughter with her, and went to see a young lad who had been seriously injured by a fall from a ladder, and now lay at the point of death. The pale, suffering face of the dying boy made a powerful impression upon Martha, so that she could not take her eyes from him. Mrs. Owen said something in a low voice to the poor mother.

"You need not whisper," replied she, wildly; "he cannot hear what we say. He will never hear anything again. Oh, my son, my son !

After a few vain attempts at consolation, Mrs. Owen went down stairs. Several of the neighbours had assembled in the little room below, and were talking over the accident.

"The ladder had been placed carelessly," said one. "It was not the height, for he could not have been many feet from the ground when he fell; certainly, not higher than the old Roman wall, if so high. What a mercy it was, Mrs. Owen, that your son escaped as he did !"

"It was indeed a mercy !"

Little Martha sobbed aloud. Several of the neighbours wondered why her mother

had brought her to such a scene. But at that moment their attention was diverted by a wild cry from the room above. It was all over. One or two of the most intimate remained, to try and comfort the bereaved mother, while the rest departed sorrowfully to their homes. Mrs. Owen had to carry Martha a part of the way. The child was weeping bitterly, but she never spoke a word until her mother had laid her in her little bed, and sat down by the side of it, weeping also ; and then she shivered all over, and said in a whisper—

“Oh, mother, mother ! if Willie had died !”

One would have thought that Martha would never have forgotten that night ; or the funeral procession, which she stood and watched a few days afterwards from the cottage window, as it wound slowly along the banks of the stream, towards the old church, with Willie standing by her side, alive and well—save the deep scar on his forehead. But the memory of her good resolutions, and the mother’s prayers, faded away with the early flowers in the green churchyard, where the poor boy was laid.

CHAPTER III.

It seemed hard, that after so many years of patient industry, and just when she was beginning to enjoy its results in her comfortable and well-ordered home, Mrs. Owen should lose her health, and grow paler and thinner, and weaker and weaker, day by day, until she was at length confined to her bed, with no hope of ever rising from it again. But God's ways are not our ways, nor his thoughts our thoughts. He doeth all things well. Mrs. Owen never murmured. She never said it was hard to die so young; although some natural fears for the future welfare of those she left behind would come over her at times, in spite of her meek submission and strong faith. It was for Martha she feared the most; her wilful, impatient, loving little Martha—her youngest born, the child of so many hopes and prayers.

"If I could only have lived a few years longer, for her sake," thought the affectionate mother. "But God's will be done. He can take care of her without me." She was sorry now that she had not taught her little daughter to be more useful in household matters, and tried to make up for it by every means in her power. But Martha, in her sorrow, had forgotten all her good reso-

lutions, and could do nothing but sit by the bed-side and weep.

"Wait until you are well again," said she; "I will do every thing then. I will attend upon you day and night, if you will only get better, mother."

Mrs. Owen felt that she should never be better in this world, but she did not say so, for fear of Martha's wild grief; and many an opportunity of useful warning and instruction passed away for ever.

Mr. Owen spent every moment, that he could spare from his work, by the side of his suffering wife; but Willie was her chief nurse and comforter. He was never tired of waiting upon her, or reading to her out of that blessed Book, which she had first taught him to love and reverence. Sometimes as he read, a sweet peace, that "peace which passeth all understanding," stole over the heart of the dying woman; while at others her eyes rested with a troubled glance upon the face of the little Martha, as if she had foreseen the life of sin and sorrow which lay before her, and could think of nothing else.

"Oh, if I might but take her with me," murmured the poor mother, upon one occasion, when her loving fears grew stronger than her faith; but it was only for a moment, and then the Comforter brought to her remembrance those beautiful words of Scripture, contained in the fifty-seventh chapter

of Isaiah, at the 18th and 19th verses—"I have seen his ways, and will heal him: I will lead him also, and restore comforts unto him and to his mourners. I create the fruit of the lips; Peace, peace to him that is far off, and to him that is near, saith the Lord; and I will heal him." "O Lord Jesus Christ," prayed the dying woman, "heal my child!"

Many a time, in after life, did Martha repeat the first words of her mother's prayer, with a wild, vain yearning, "Would that I had died then!" The last she heeded not.

"Oh, take me! take me with you!" exclaimed the child, throwing her arms about her mother's neck; "and Willie also."

"God forgive me," murmured Mrs. Owen, in a feeble voice. "It was wrong of me to say what I did. We had forgotten your dear father. What would he do when I am gone without his children—without his little Martha."

"But father is not like you. He does not love us as you do; and Betsey Giles says, that if you die, he will be sure and marry that cross, hateful Jane Brown."

Mrs. Owen grew fearfully pale, and a cold shudder crept to her head.

"Willie," whispered she, turning to her son, and trying to speak calmly, "send some one for your father. Tell him I am not so well—but gently, so as not to alarm him;

and then come back to me as quickly as you can."

Martha ceased her sobs, and stood by her mother's side, silent, and awe-stricken, watching the change that had passed over her face. Once only had she seen that look, years ago, upon the countenance of the dying boy; but she knew it again, and thought of the sad funeral procession, and the green mound in the old churchyard, which would soon be all that was left of that beloved parent. As she gazed thus, Mrs. Owen suddenly opened her eyes, and smiled peacefully. Presently she spoke in a low, clear voice, but not her own words:

" 'I am the resurrection, and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die.' 'Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out.' I believe—I come—my blessed Saviour. 'O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?'—Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.'"

She was aroused by Willie's return.

"Father will be here directly," said the boy.

"It is too late. God bless you, my son. You have been a great comfort to me. God bless you, my children. My poor little Martha!"

Mr. Owen came in a short time afterwards, but his wife's speech was gone. It was painful to see the vain efforts which she made to address him. But after a little while, the smile stole back to her pale face. Whatever her trouble had been, she had taken it to her Saviour, and was at peace. Her last act was to place the trembling hands of the poor frightened children in those of their father; and then, pointing upward, her spirit passed gently away to Him who gave and redeemed it with his own precious blood.

Mr. Owen's grief for the loss of this patient and devoted wife and mother, the partner and soother of all his joys and sorrows for so many years, was deep and overwhelming; but he aroused himself, at length, for the sake of his children. He worked harder than ever, that they might be kept at school a few years longer, according to her wish; and the work did not hurt him. But when he came home tired at night, missing her cheerful voice, and seeing only her empty chair, then it was that a sense of utter loneliness came over him; and the strong man bowed down his head and wept like a child.

Willie could only think of one thing likely to comfort him at such times; and he used to go and fetch his mother's Bible, and offer to read it to him, but he could not bear it. It would have been better for him, and for them all, if he could. He would not have

felt so lonely then. But the boy read it to himself, and to his sister; and Martha began to love the Bible more than she had ever done before. She no longer stole away to the green churchyard, to cast herself weeping upon her mother's grave; for Willie had made her understand that she was not there, but had gone up to heaven; and that the same almighty Redeemer would take her also, in his own good time, if she would only believe in his name, and love him.

"Oh, sister," he used to say, "it is such a beautiful thing to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. It makes one feel so happy—so very happy!" And then Martha, perceiving the smile upon his pale face, and recalling to mind the joyful countenance of her dying mother, would cling to him, and beg him not to die and go away too.

Every day the love between the brother and sister grew stronger and stronger, the more especially when, after a time, Mr. Owen began to absent himself from his home, and their long winter evenings were spent almost entirely alone. Next to the Scriptures, Willie loved nothing better than reading about foreign countries; and he used to say, that if it were not for leaving Martha, he should like to be a sailor, for the boy had a brave spirit, and feared neither toil nor hardship. His little sister always trembled when he spoke of the sea, as if she had had a presentiment of what afterwards came to pass.

CHAPTER IV.

THE poor children did the best they could. Willie was careful to sweep up the hearth, and have a bright, cheerful fire against his father's return; while Martha set out the little tea-table, and was always ready to fetch his slippers, and pour out his tea. To be sure, there were no hot cakes—no nicely cooked dinners; Mrs. Owen, like many other good mothers, had always attended to these things herself. She did not think to be called away so soon, or she would have endeavoured to teach Martha more than she had done. It was not the child's fault, if their small joints of meat were sometimes roasted to a cinder, and at others, so under-done that no one could touch them—at least, not at first. But she might soon have learned to do better, if she had tried. There is nothing that we cannot do, ay, and do well, if we only try. But Martha grew careless and indolent; and because her father did not scold her—how could he?—and Willie never seemed to care what he ate, she took it into her head that it did not signify, and gave herself no further concern about the matter. A badly cooked dinner has driven many a man from his home. Mr. Owen made every allowance for her. "After all," thought he, "she is but a child, and has no

one to teach her anything. What can I expect?" So he left off speaking to her on the subject, and resorted to other means.

One evening he was later than usual before he returned home. He was often late now. Martha had cooked him a rasher of bacon, which she placed upon the hob, and covered over with a plate, partly to keep it warm, and partly to conceal its scorched and blackened appearance.

"I do not know what is the matter with the fire," said she; "everything will burn."

"I wish you would let me try," observed Willie.

"You! what should boys know about cooking?"

"Not much; but I used to watch and see how poor mother did it, and she never burned anything."

"Well, you may try if you like," said Martha; "I only wish you had spoken before." And she cast a rueful glance at the unfortunate rasher.

Just then Mr. Owen came in rubbing his hands, for it was a cold night; and calling out in a pleasant voice for his tea.

"It is quite ready," exclaimed Martha, setting it before him with a timid air, and wishing with all her heart that she had taken more pains. Mr. Owen took his meal without a word. Martha was touched by his patient forbearance.

"I am sorry that the rasher was burned so much," said she; "it shall not happen again—if I can help it, that is."

"Was it burned? Never mind, Patty; you are but a young housekeeper, after all. You have done your best, my child."

"Not always, I am afraid," said Martha, in a low voice. "But I will try, indeed I will."

"Should you not like some one to teach and take care of you, my little Martha, and to be always with you?" asked her father, drawing her towards him.

"I do not know. Willie and I am very happy together."

"But then you would have nothing to do but go to school, and take long walks as you used."

"Yes, I should like that very much. What pleasant rambles we have had together in the old woods. But we have never once been there since—since poor mother died. Oh, what a long, long time ago it seems!"

"It does, indeed," said Mr. Owen thoughtfully.

Assisted by her brother, Martha removed the tea things, and having washed them carefully up, took out her needlework, at which she was very quick and clever, and sat down quietly by her father's side. Willie fetched his books, and was soon wholly absorbed in the history of a shipwreck, which

had happened off the coast of Africa, and in which every soul on board perished. He did not read it aloud, for fear of frightening Martha, who never could bear to hear of such things. But Willie was not frightened.

"What does it signify," thought he, "where one dies, if he is only in the path of duty—if he is only trusting in the Lord Jesus Christ?" And he wondered whether all those poor sailors, who had gone down so suddenly into the deep sea, had ever heard of a Saviour.

Mr. Owen glanced from the intelligent countenance of his son, to the bright face of Martha, as she sat with her head bent down. She raised it, and their eyes met. Martha looked very like her mother.

"How snug and comfortable we all are this evening," said she, smiling. "It is quite a treat to have you with us, father. It puts me in mind of old times—only"—her lip quivered, and a large tear fell upon her work as she bent over it. It sounded strange to hear one so young talking of "old times."

"I wonder," said Willie, looking up from his book, "I wonder if the saints in heaven are permitted to behold what goes on upon earth. Somehow I think that mother would be pleased if she could see us."

Mr. Owen did not reply. A sudden mis-giving came over him that he had been too hasty, and that they might have been very

happy together after all, if he had only had a little patience; but it was too late now. There was a long pause; and then Mr. Owen, who was evidently desirous of changing the conversation, told Willie that he had determined to let him remain another twelve-month at school.

"It was your poor mother's wish," said he, "that you should have as good an education as I could afford to give you. And I must say that you have hitherto made the most of your time.

Willie's eyes sparkled with delight; but a moment afterwards he said earnestly—

"But are you sure, father, that you can afford it? If not, I would rather help you to work."

"Quite sure, my dear boy; everything seems to have prospered with me of late. Come here, Patty. What should you say if I were to buy you a new white frock?"

"Would it be right?" asked Martha, glancing at the mourning dress which she still wore. "To be sure this looks dismal enough."

"You would like it, then? And a sash? What colour would you prefer?"

"Let me see, pink would look very bright and pretty—or a pale blue—which shall it be, Willie?"

"Blue," like your eyes, "replied her brother.

"And Willie shall have a blue handkerchief

for his neck at the same time; and a new cap and jacket."

"How delightful!" exclaimed Martha, clapping her hands. "But what are we all to be so fine for?"

"To welcome your mother to her future home."

"My mother!" repeated the wondering girl; "my mother is in heaven. She will never return to us, Willie says; but we may go to her."

"I know that she can never return," replied Mr. Owen; "and therefore I am about to give you a new mother, who will love and take care of you, as she would have done if it had pleased God to spare her."

"Father, dear father," exclaimed Martha, clinging to him. "I will do everything you tell me—I will be *so* careful and industrious, indeed I will. But do not bring any one home to fill her place—I could not bear it—I would never call her mother, no, never! I should hate her! Oh father, don't marry that odious Jane Brown. Please don't. We shall be so happy without her."

"Who told you that I was going to marry Jane Brown?" asked Mr. Owen, putting her from him with a stern look.

"Betsy Giles, years ago; before my own dear mother was first taken ill. I had forgotten all about it until to-night. But it is not true. It cannot be true."

"Martha," said her father, in a firm but gentle voice, "it is perfectly true that I am going to marry Jane Brown. If you cannot love her all at once, as she is prepared to love you both, I must at least insist upon your obedience and respect. Well, Willie, have you anything to say, my boy?"

"No, father. It is of no use saying anything. I am very sorry; but we must try and make the best of it."

Mr. Owen gazed for a moment upon the fearless countenance of his son; and then stooped down and kissed him for the first time since his poor mother's death. He would have kissed Martha also; but she shrank from him with a passionate cry, and burying her face in her hands, wept as if her little heart would break. Mr. Owen could not bear to hear her cry, and after a time he went out and left the brother and sister together.

CHAPTER V.

It was a dreary evening; the rain beat against the casement, and fell hissing down the wide chimney into the blazing fire which Willie had taken care to have ready against the return of the newly married pair. He had rubbed up the furniture, and arranged everything in the best way he could,

for Martha refused to assist him, and lay crouched before the fire more like a dog than a little girl.

"I am glad it rains," said she, lifting up her head for a moment, as a wild gust of wind swept over the cottage. "I hope she will be wet through, and catch her death of cold."

"Oh, Martha, Martha, you must not say that. Come, get up and put on your pretty white dress. They will be back soon."

"Take it away," exclaimed Martha; "I hate the very sight of it."

"But what will father say?"

"I don't care—I wont wear it—I wont dress to receive that woman."

"At least you will let me smooth your hair a little; will you not, dearest?"

Martha laid her head in her brother's lap. It ached sadly with crying so much; and the gentle way in which Willie combed out her long, tangled curls, seemed to soothe her.

"There, now you look more like yourself," said he, at length. "If you would only change your dress, just to please father."

"I do not want to please him," replied Martha, sullenly.

"That is very wrong, my sister. A great many persons marry again; and he only did it, he says, that we might be more comfortable at home, and have some one to look after us; although to be sure we were very

happy together before : but it does not signify thinking about that now. You remember little Annie Mills, Martha, who used to play with us so often before her parents went to America?"

"Well?"

"Her father married again. But her new mother was very kind to her; and I have heard Annie say that she loved her dearly."

"I will never love Jane Brown, if she is ever so kind—never, never!" sobbed the wilful girl.

Willie looked at her for a few moments in silence, and then went and fetched the large Bible, and asked if he might read to her.

"Not now," said Martha, turning away her head; "I do not feel good enough to-night."

"We are none of us good enough at any any time; and the Bible is to teach and make us better."

"But I do not seem to care about being much better. Oh, Willie, I am afraid I have a very wicked heart, and that it will never be otherwise."

"Nothing is impossible to God," said Willie, earnestly. "Suppose we ask him to change and soften it—shall we?"

"Not to-night," replied Martha; "I cannot pray to-night."

"Then I will pray for you, my sister." And Willie knelt down, as he had so often done, before his mother's chair, and prayed

in his simple way, that God would be pleased, for Christ's sake, to have compassion upon his dear little sister; to take away her heart of stone, and to give her a heart of flesh; and make her patient and submissive; and incline her mother-in-law to love and care for her, even as she would have done who was now an angel in heaven. When he had finished his prayer, he looked up and saw Martha kneeling beside him.

"Thank you," said she, in a subdued voice. "Now I will go and change my dress."

She had but just returned, and was sitting by the fire, half smiling at his admiration of her appearance, when Mr. and Mrs. Owen arrived. The former took off his wife's cloak and bonnet, for her fingers were quite stiff with the cold; and having placed her in the arm chair by the blazing fire, and welcomed her kindly to her new home, called to the children, who had shrunk away at their entrance. Mrs. Owen scarcely noticed Willie, but was evidently pleased with Martha's appearance.

"You never told me your little daughter was such a beauty," said she, turning to her husband. And the dim light prevented her from observing the girl's flushed countenance and quivering lips, as she struggled to free herself from her caress. "What is your name, my dear?"

"Martha."

"No one would take them to be brother and sister," continued she, again appealing to Mr. Owen, and casting rather a scornful glance at poor Willie.

"They are not much alike certainly. But Willie is a good boy."

"Very likely. Handsome is that handsome does. It is a pity he has that ugly scar on his forehead."

"It was not his fault," exclaimed Martha; "it was mine. I gave him that scar."

"What does the dear child mean, Robert?"

"I have almost forgotten it myself; it is such an old story. He was gathering her some flowers, I believe, when the wall gave way, and he fell.—But are you not going to let us have some tea, my child? We dined early, and I am quite hungry."

"So am I," said Mrs. Owen. "And, Martha dear, I wish you could find me a pair of old slippers any where about. They have not sent my things yet, and my feet are very wet."

Martha arose with a sullen air. As she went into the adjoining room, she heard Mrs. Owen say, "Robert, that girl of yours looks like an angel." And her father sighed. He might well sigh. Martha opened one of the drawers, and took from thence a pair of shoes, slightly the worse for wear, and then, throwing up the window, she flung them out as

far as she could reach into the dark wet road. They had been her mother's.

"What can you be doing," asked Willie, "with the window open at this time of the evening—and such an evening?"

"Never mind; I will tell you another time. Now let us get tea."

"Well," said Mrs. Owen, when they returned, "have you found me any slippers, dear?"

"There are none," replied Martha.

Her father looked at her, but more in sorrow than in anger, and made room for her to come and sit beside him while she poured out the tea for the last time. Mrs. Owen seemed to be the only one who was quite at ease; she praised Martha, laughed at Willie's awkwardness in handing the tea and bread and butter, thereby making him ten times more awkward; suggested innumerable alterations and improvements in the cottage, and, upon the arrival of her trunks, proceeded to unpack and arrange them, as if she had lived there all her life. Willie good-naturedly offered to help her; but his sister never moved.

"Martha," said her father, sitting down beside her, "it is natural for you to feel as you do. I am not blaming you, child; but for my sake try and strive against it. You have already won the heart of your new

mother; do not cast it from you. Let us all love and bear with one another, and be happy together as we used—shall we, darling?”

“I can never love her,” exclaimed Martha, pointing to the adjoining room.

“Try, only try, dearest. She will be very kind to you; I am sure she will.”

“But she is not kind to Willie.”

“It is her way; no one can help loving Willie, when they come to know him as we do.”

Martha's eyes sparkled, as they always did when any one praised her brother.

“That is right; now you look like my own bright little Patty.” Martha kissed him, and tried to smile; for she loved her father dearly, and was touched by his affectionate forbearance.

The evening ended more cheerfully than it had commenced. Much to Willie's delight, Mr. Owen announced his intention of having family prayer again as they used, when they were a little more settled, and regretted having so long neglected this important duty. He was evidently desirous of beginning a new life, and determined to do everything in his power to promote the comfort and happiness of those connected with him. If the other members of the family had only been influenced by the same spirit, how much of future sin and sorrow might have been saved.

CHAPTER VI.

Mrs. OWEN, like many other weak-minded persons, was apt to be led away by appearances, and the same cause which made her dislike Willie induced her at first to overwhelm his sister with her praises and caresses. It was wrong of Martha to repulse them as she did. Who knows what her influence for good might have been in that little household; or how she might have used that influence in behalf of the brother whom she so tenderly loved, and become perhaps in time the peace-maker, rendering them all happy and united together: for they all loved her then.

After a while, Mrs. Owen grew weary of trying to win her step-daughter's affections; for she did try for a long time, and really felt anxious to make Martha like her. But it was of no use, the wilful girl continued to treat her with the utmost coldness, and could never be persuaded to call her anything but "Mrs. Owen." Her father scolded, and Willie reasoned with her in vain. Poor Willie! it only made her the more violent to hear him pleading for one who had always treated him so unjustly and unkindly; for Willie was very patient and obliging, and did all he could to please his new mother, but without success. After a time, as we have said, Mrs.

Owen gave over trying to win Martha's affections; and then the brother and sister had a sad life of it indeed, and every one pitied them, and blamed Mr. Owen for marrying again. They would have pitied him too if they had known all.

Mr. Owen never had family prayer. When he came home at night and heard his wife's harsh voice, and Martha's provoking words, and saw Willie looking so pale and sorrowful, and altered—so sadly altered—he felt as if it would have been a mockery. Many have reasoned thus, and so neglected the means most likely to do themselves good. They are afraid to pray. Oh, are they not afraid to die? Who knows how soon they may be called away, prayerless and Christless, to the grave? It is no mockery for us to come as sinners to the throne of grace. But it is a mockery to go on in our sins day by day, as if there were no God in heaven.

Mrs. Owen's unaccountable dislike to Willie seemed to increase every day. She was continually taunting him with the idle life he led, and wondering how a great boy like him could bear to be living upon his father, instead of trying to do something for himself. She took care, however, to find him plenty to do, and would frequently keep him from school to fetch her some water, or chop her some wood, either of which might just as well have been done at some other time.

But Willie never complained, never replied. Martha alone knew where he found strength to bear what he did—where we may all find strength to help us in the hour of need. She had often seen him kneeling down by the old fountain, with clasped hands and uplifted eyes, and praying so earnestly that even she ventured not to interrupt him; after which he would return to the house with a smile upon his pale face, ready to fetch more water, or do whatever was required of him.

Martha frequently wished to resemble this dear brother. But she only wished; she never trusted in Christ, she never prayed to God to change her stubborn heart, and forgive her all her sins, for Jesus Christ's sake, or he would have done so, according to our Saviour's gracious promise—"Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son," John xiv. 13. But Willie still prayed for her.

The brother and sister had no long walks together, as they had hoped. It was as much as they could do to find time to learn their lessons against the following day. Mrs. Owen took care to keep Martha constantly employed, and taught her many useful things. But she no longer loved her—how could she? Instead of admiring her fair complexion and white hands, she used to say that she would have no fine ladies in her house, fit for nothing but to be looked at. She

even threatened to cut off her long hair ; but Martha appealed to her father, and his stern interference settled the matter at once. It was a pity that Mr. Owen did not oftener interfere ; but he was naturally of a quiet and easy temper. When Martha was not at school, or busy about the house, her mother-in-law always found her plenty of needle-work, which was the only thing, she told her, that she could do.

Nearly a year had passed away since Mr. Owen's marriage. It was the longest and saddest the poor children had ever known ; but there were sadder still to come. The summer had gone by they scarcely knew how : no pleasant walks—no going a nutting or blackberrying in the old woods—no flower-seeking. They never remembered so few flowers ; and yet it had been a beautiful summer. The autumn wind already began to sing around the cottage eaves at night ; and the red and yellow leaves fell from the old trees, and went whirling and dancing down the garden path towards the bright stream, where they floated away out of sight.

Mr. and Mrs. Owen had gone out to spend the evening at a friend's house, leaving the brother and sister alone. What a treat it was to them to be alone once more ! Mrs. Owen took care that Martha should have plenty of needle-work to do ; but she could not think of anything for Willie. So

he brought his book as he used to do in the old times, and, sitting down at his sister's feet, read aloud a touching, but rather improbable history of a poor boy who ran away to sea, and returned home, years afterwards, a great admiral, and so changed that his mother called him "sir," not recognising him until he fell upon her neck, and kissed her, and asked her to forgive him.

"What a beautiful story!" exclaimed Martha, brushing away a few tears.

"I thought you would like it. And now, put down your work for a moment, dear. I want to talk to you very seriously."

"Well, what is it, Willie?"

"I am almost afraid to tell you; and yet it would be a comfort to me."

"Tell me, then. Oh if I could be any comfort to you, instead of a plague and a torment!"

"Hush, you must not say that. You know how I love you, Martha; and that I would not dream of leaving you, if it were not for both our sakes."

"Leaving me!" exclaimed his sister, turning very pale. "You are not going to die, are you?"

"I think I should if I were to remain here much longer," continued Willie, in a tone of unusual excitement. "Look at my arms, sister, how thin they have grown, and my face. But it is my own fault; I ought

to try and bear it better—and I have tried : but it is wearing me away.”

“My poor brother! My poor Willie!” sobbed Martha. “But these marks on your arm! Surely, surely she has not dared—”

“I was slow and stupid—I believe I am getting stupid—and so she struck me.”

Martha ground her teeth with rage.

“Have you told father?” asked she.

“No; I did not intend to have told any one. I had forgotten that they were there. Perhaps I was stupid.”

“Oh, Willie, Willie!” exclaimed his sister, “what shall we do?”

“I will tell you what I should like to do, darling, if you did not mind, and if you would not think me selfish. I should like to go to sea. It will only be for a few years.”

“And then you will come back a great admiral,” interrupted Martha, clapping her hands, “like the poor sailor boy of whom you have been reading, and take me away, and we will live together all the rest of our lives. Oh, we shall be so happy!”

“And will you let me go? Will you try and do without me for a few years, dearest?”

“To be sure I will. I do not mind so long as you are happy, and out of the reach of that woman. The time will soon pass away.”

“I think it will be for the best, Martha. I have thought of it for a long while day and

night. When I am gone, perhaps she will be kinder to you. She does not hate you as she does me. If I thought that she would lay a finger upon you I would not go."

"She dare not!" exclaimed his sister, with flashing eyes. "But when do you mean to run away, Willie? Only you must not go without shoes or stockings, as that poor boy did. Let me see, the old pedlar will be here to-morrow, he always comes on a Saturday, and I will ask him to buy my coral necklace, and give you the money."

"There will be no occasion, Martha dear. I do not intend to run away. I shall ask my father's leave. I should have done so before, only I wanted to talk to you first."

"He will never suffer you to go," said Martha, a little disappointed. "She will not let him."

"At any rate I can but try. I should be afraid to leave home against my father's consent, and without his blessing, lest God should withhold his."

"He did not think of that," said Martha, laying her hand on the book.

"But that is only a story."

"Is it not true then about his being made a great admiral, and coming home so rich and grand, and living happy ever after? I am so sorry."

"It may be true; I do not know about that; but I am sure that it would not be right

to leave home without my father's leave. And somehow I think that he will let me go when I tell him how miserable I am."

"At any rate do not ask him before her."

Willie promised that he would not. Long did they sit together, talking hopefully of the future; and then Willie fetched his mother's Bible, and having read a chapter aloud, knelt down and asked God's blessing on their plans, and that he would be pleased to bring them to pass in his own good time and way, for Jesus' sake.

CHAPTER VII.

SURELY God answers prayer. Martha had just gone to bed, and Willie was sitting by the fireside, still reading his Bible, when Mr. Owen opened the cottage door, and came in alone. He did not feel very well; and as his wife was not inclined to leave so early, and a neighbour had kindly offered to see her safely home, he came away without her.

"Still up, my boy," exclaimed he, "and reading your favourite book as usual? After all, there is no book like the Bible."

"Shall I read a chapter to you?" asked Willie, longing all the while to speak of other things, but thinking it right to offer.

"Yes, I should like it." Mr. Owen leaned

back in his chair, and seemed listening with interest. The time was not lost while Willie read. There never is when we set aside our own wishes, and seek only God's glory.

That night Mr. Owen gave his consent to Willie's going to sea, and not only his consent, but his fervent blessing. He regretted that there should be any necessity for it, but at the same time admitted that there was a necessity; and that he thought the boy would be happier any where than at home.

"Alas!" exclaimed he, "that it should have come to this. I do not know whose fault it is. I am sure I meant to do right when I married Jane Brown, and thought and believed that she would be a second mother to you both."

"It cannot be helped now," said Willie, cheerfully. "Let us hope for brighter days. Somehow I feel almost sure that things will go on better when I am away. It vexes poor Martha to see me unhappy; and do what I will I cannot please my stepmother, and I have tried—indeed I have."

"I believe you, Willie. You have always been a good boy and my greatest comfort."

How glad Willie was that he had not run away to sea, as he had been often tempted to do, and so missed those sweet words—almost the same as those uttered so long ago by his dying mother. How thankful he felt to God for having heard and granted his

prayers, and made his way straight before him. That night, for the first time for months, he lay down and slept soundly, for his mind was at rest. He was too grateful for the present to have any fears about the future. When Mrs. Owen's harsh voice awoke him in the morning, he was sailing, in his dreams, in a gallant ship over the wide ocean, in search of those riches which were to make himself and Martha the happiest brother and sister in all the world.

Mrs. Owen made no opposition to Willie's going to sea. Perhaps she perceived that it would have been of no use, for her husband was very determined when he had once made up his mind. Perhaps she felt glad to get rid of him. And now that it was all settled, and nothing remained but to hear of a ship and prepare his simple outfit, Martha's heart failed her. Willie did all he could to cheer her. Sometimes he would tell her of the wonderful things which he had heard were to be met with abroad, and ask what she would like him to bring her home; but Martha did not seem to care for any of them.

"Only come back to me safe and soon," exclaimed she. "I do not want any thing else. I only want my brother."

"Her tears made him so unhappy at last, that he almost regretted the approaching fulfilment of all his boyish dreams; and began to think that it was wrong and

selfish to go away and leave his poor little sister behind. But Martha guessed his thoughts, and exerted herself in her turn to render the short time that they would remain together as cheerful as possible. Almost before she had finished his shirts, and marked his stockings, and made him a little housewife to contain his thread and needles, and taught him, half laughingly, how to wear a thimble, and sew on a button, Mr. Owen received intelligence of a ship about to sail in a few weeks for a port in South America.

We will not attempt to describe the parting between the brother and sister, or to repeat all Willie's affectionate warnings and exhortations, and Martha's solemn promise to obey them, and to try, and pray to God to help her to become more patient and humble and meek-spirited, following in the footsteps of the blessed Saviour, who, when he was reviled, reviled not again. It was a sorrowful parting, most sorrowful for poor Martha, because she had the least faith.

Mr. Owen was deeply agitated; and even his wife's hand trembled as she held it out to Willie and wished him good bye in a faltering tone. But Willie was not contented with merely shaking hands with her, but put his arms round her neck and kissed her, asking her forgiveness if he had ever unintentionally offended her. Mrs. Owen could not speak for tears; and then Willie embraced

her again, and begged her to be kind to Martha for his sake.

When he was gone, and his father with him to see him off, Mrs. Owen made a cup of tea, and took it up stairs to Martha, who had thrown herself upon the bed, weary with crying.

"Come," said she tenderly, "rouse yourself, my poor child. You have eaten nothing to-day. Come, Martha dear, sit up and take this nice cup of tea."

"I do not want any thing," said Martha, pushing her rudely away, "only to be left alone."

Mrs. Owen stood a moment looking at her with a changeful countenance, and then bent down and kissed her flushed cheek.

"Go away," exclaimed the unhappy girl; "I hate you! I hate you worse than ever now that you have driven Willie from his home. He would never have left us but for you. If any thing happens to him it is all your doing. Oh, Willie, Willie! My dear, dear brother!"

Mrs. Owen turned and went down stairs without reply; the passionate words of her stepdaughter ringing in her ears, and haunting her ever after—"If any thing happens to him, it will be all your doing."

Even before Willie had quitted his native village, all Martha's solemn promises were forgotten. It was her own fault if his

predictions were not fulfilled, that when he was gone every thing would go on better at home. No one could have been kinder than her father, or more forbearing than Mrs. Owen, until her patience was fairly worn out; and even her husband could not wonder at it, seeing the provocation which she daily received. Thus did Martha again cast away all chance of peace and happiness, through her own wilful and ungovernable temper.

CHAPTER VIII.

MANY a long winter night did Martha lie awake listening to the wind as it swept round the house, and thinking of her brother at sea. It might have made her less bitter against her if she had known how deeply Mrs. Owen sympathized in her fears and sorrows, and how she would have given worlds, if she had had them, that Willie was once more safe at home. His last parting embrace, his asking her forgiveness who should have asked his, had unsealed the current of her affections, and she wondered how she could ever have disliked one so good and gentle.

About this time there was a change in the household, and a little baby was born. Mr. Owen was evidently very proud of it, and

appeared hurt at Martha's coldness and indifference.

"I thought all girls loved babies," said he, as she gave it back to him without even kissing it.

"Surely you cannot expect me to love her baby!" replied Martha, bitterly. But she did love it nevertheless. Who could avoid loving the little helpless innocent; more especially when it came to know her, and to smile, and stretch out its tiny arms to her? She used to half smother it with kisses when no one saw her, and would nurse and sing to it by the hour together. But she was too proud, too foolishly proud, to take the slightest notice of the child when its mother was present, which led to many misunderstandings and much future evil.

Every day little Susan, for so the child was named, grew more and more winning, and every day Martha found herself more and more neglected. No one seemed to care now whether she was out of temper or not. They were very happy and cheerful without her, even her father; and what was worse than all, she felt that she had no one to blame but herself.

Mr. Owen received a letter from his son congratulating him upon Susan's birth, of which he had heard from his sister, and praying that it might prove a bond of union and a blessing to them all. It was a beautiful

letter. Mrs. Owen wept when she heard it read, and felt how little she deserved such a blessing, while Susan, who was seated for a wonder upon Martha's knee, put back the long hair from her face with her little dimpled fingers, and looked at her as much as to say,—“do let me be a bond of union between you.—Do love me, sister.” Of course she was much too young really to understand what was going on, but it seemed as if she did.

Martha put her hastily down, and went out of the room to read the letter in quiet. The brother and sister wrote to each other as often as possible; the former frequently, the latter could only send a letter when her brother was to be long at one port. Willie's letters were all the comfort that the poor girl had, but she did not tell him so for fear of grieving him. If she had but listened to the affectionate warnings given her from time to time, how different every thing would have been.

It was strange how fond little Susan was of Martha. When she grew old enough she used to follow her about wherever she went, and liked nothing better than to go out with her into the green fields. They were very happy together, for Martha would romp and play with her almost as gaily as she and Willie had played so many years before. The child had become very dear to her, al-

though no one would have guessed it from her manner, unless indeed they could have seen them alone. Sometimes little Susan would ask in her lisping voice—

“Why is it, Matty, that you never kiss me when mother is by?”

And Martha would answer, laughingly, “Be contented that I kiss you at all;” and endeavour to divert her attention to something else.

It was a beautiful summer’s day: Martha had had a little dispute with her stepmother—an almost daily occurrence—and was glad to escape the storm of angry words which she had provoked, by taking little Susan out for a walk. The blue sky and the bright sunshine seemed to calm her, and she felt sorry that she had been so hasty.

At the end of the garden they met the postman with a letter from Willie, and being eager to read it, Martha crossed the wooden bridge, so as to be out of sight of the house, and sitting down on the banks of the winding stream, was soon wholly absorbed in its contents. Susan sat for a few moments quietly by her side, and then she touched her sister’s arm, and asked her if she would be so good as to gather her some of the blue forget-me-nots, which grew by the water.

“Presently, darling,” replied Martha, without looking up. “You must not tease me now, I am busy.”

Susan went and stood by the edge of the stream, gazing at the bright blue flowers which she had set her heart upon having. Presently the child grew impatient, and thinking to gather them without waiting for Martha, over-reached herself, and fell into the stream.

Martha's piercing screams attracted the attention of a labouring man, who was providentially passing near at the time; and, perceiving what had happened, he immediately took off his coat and plunged into the water. Just as he was bringing the child out pale and insensible, Mrs. Owen came rushing over the wooden bridge like one distracted.

"This is your doing!" said she, turning to Martha. "You pushed her in—you have murdered her! I knew you would some time or other. Fool that I was to trust her with you!"

Martha was too much shocked and frightened to make any reply. She followed them mechanically, as they bore the dripping and apparently lifeless body to the home from whence she had bounded forth, scarcely half an hour before, full of health and joy. But when she attempted to go into the inner room, where the child was laid, her step-mother thrust her forth with a wailing cry.

"Not you—not you—you have killed her!"

Mr. Owen was at his work when the report reached him that Martha had pushed her



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little step-sister into the water, and that the child was drowned. He could never remember how he reached home on that terrible day. Martha stood in the outer room weeping bitterly. She attempted to speak, but he lifted up his hand as if he would have struck her, and then dropping it again passed on without a word. Martha crept to the door and listened eagerly; but every thing was very still. Presently the doctor came out.

"Your sister is better," said he kindly.

"Better?—God be praised! I thought she was dead."

"Poor child! It has been a sad fright for you all. But I think she will do well now. You can go in and look at her if you like; but you must be very quiet."

"No, thank you, sir," said Martha.

"Perhaps it is as well. Only she asked for you just now—that is if your name is Martha."

"Then she can speak. She will tell them that I did not do it—that I did not push her in. Dear little lamb!—I who love her so much!"

The good doctor did not quite understand to what she alluded; but he spoke kindly and soothingly, assuring her that Susan would soon be quite well again.

The child had fallen into a quiet sleep, and as they watched by the bedside, the long hours crept wearily on. Martha remained

alone; they had forgotten all about her. She leaned her burning forehead against the cool window-pane, and saw the sun set, and the little stars come out one by one and shine down upon her with their pure, calm light, and she wished that they were shining over her grave. Poor Martha! She thought that she should be at rest then. Many have thought to find rest in death; but there is none for those who die out of Christ. She was aroused at length by her father's voice, and felt his arms thrown round her.

"Forgive me, Martha," said he gently. "I should never have believed it but for your own conduct—your own avowed dislike to the poor child. I do not think that I ever did quite believe it; it was too terrible! God knows what I suffered."

"We have all suffered," said Martha, passing her hand wearily across her forehead. "How is Susan?"

"Better—almost well. She has asked for you several times; but her mother thought—"

"No matter," interrupted Martha, "I do not want to see her. I am going to bed."

"But you have had nothing to eat all day; and your forehead and hands are burning. We must not have you ill, my child."

"Why not—no one cares for me!"

"Oh, Martha, you should not say that."

"It is the truth. No one but Willie, and he is far away. I am alone in the world."

Oh, mother, mother, would that I had died with you !”

Mr. Owen did not know what to say. He was deeply moved, and his tears fell upon Martha's face, as he bent over her. It is terrible to see a man cry. Martha roused herself at the sight, and kissed him with many fond and endearing words. If she was indeed “alone in the world,” it was the fault of her own evil temper. She felt that her father still loved her ; and that he would have loved her better if she had tried more to deserve his affection.

In the hour of deliverance, when she first heard of Susan's recovery, Martha had exclaimed, “God be praised !” And yet she went to bed that night without praise, without thanksgiving, without prayer. No wonder that her head throbbed, and her heart beat, and she could not sleep.

CHAPTER IX.

A FEW days after the events recorded in the previous chapter, Martha told her father she had heard that Mrs. Turnbull, the dress-maker at D——, wanted a young girl who was quick and clever with her needle, and that she should very much like to go. Mr. Owen consulted with his wife, who was pleased at the thought of getting rid of her, and advised

him by all means to let her have her own way. "She will soon grow tired of it," said she, "and be glad to come back again; and the change may do her good." He consented, however, very unwillingly, and warned Martha that she would have to sit a great many hours, and that he was afraid she would miss the fresh air and long country walks of which she was so fond.

"I do not mind how hard I work," replied Martha. "I do not mind any thing if I can only get away from home."

"At any rate, my child, do not forget that you have a home to come back to whenever you feel inclined, and where you will be always welcome."

Martha thanked him; and it was settled that she should go to D—— as soon as the necessary arrangements could be made.

Mrs. Turnbull readily agreed to take her; and a few days afterwards Martha left home "for good." Solemn words! We know that all things and all changes work together for good to them that love God. But did she love God? Had she not ceased even to pray to him? How then could she expect that it would be for good?

Little Susan wept bitterly when she went away; and Martha gave her her coral necklace to comfort her, Willie having promised to bring her a much handsomer one on his return from sea.

"My own precious Susan!" exclaimed she. "Why, I would not hurt a hair of your head for all the world, although you are her child. Kiss me, darling; and mind, if you show the necklace to any one I will beat you when I come back."

"No you wont," replied the child, clinging round her neck—"Matty no beat her little sister."

Martha could not help crying with her.

"Oh, Susan," said she, "do not let her teach you to hate me."

Susan looked at her wonderingly.

"Promise me that you will always love me as you do now, dear one!"

"Always—always," repeated the child.

Just then Mrs Owen entered the room. They had never exchanged a word since the day that Susan fell into the water. Martha disengaged the child's arms from about her neck, and kissing her almost coldly, would have gone away without speaking, if her stepmother had not held out her hand, and said—

"Good bye, Martha. I hope you will do well."

"Good bye," replied Martha, without taking the offered hand. She thought that Mrs Owen ought to have apologized for her cruel accusation; and so she would, perhaps, if she had looked and spoken less proudly. In what a different spirit did Willie leave

home; how different was the influence which he left behind! Mrs. Owen shed no tears when Martha went away.

"It was her own wish," said she. "I am glad that she is gone. I would have been kind to her if she had allowed me. That girl has a bad heart. If I have my will she never comes back here again while I live."

Although D—— was only a few miles from her native village, Martha had never been there before. The gay appearance of the shops, and the number of people walking about, were all quite new to her, and she forgot, in her wonder and delight, how little time she should have to look at them. Notwithstanding being obliged to sit and work for so many hours, Martha enjoyed the change. She liked needle-work, and was very quick and clever at it. Besides which, it was pleasant to be for the first time with young people of her own age. It seemed like a new world to her. It was a world full of temptations. How could she hope to escape them in her own strength?

After a time, Mrs. Turnbull gave her a small salary, which Martha spent in buying smart dresses and ribbons, like the other girls.

Many were the taunting remarks made by Mrs. Owen, when she occasionally came over to see her father on the sabbath day. They had a bad effect, for they roused her spirit, and hardened it against the good which Mr.

Owen's affectionate warnings might otherwise have done her, and finally kept her away from them altogether.

Many admired Martha for her good looks, but no one loved her, because she was not good tempered—no one but Ruth Egleton, and Ruth loved everybody. At first Martha scarcely noticed her, for she was very shy and retiring; but afterwards she began to compare her to her brother Willie. Not that Ruth was like him in appearance, but only in her words and actions, and in the tone of her mind, and the quiet and peaceful smile upon her pale face. Both Willie and Ruth had obtained peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ—that peace which passeth all understanding: and when he gives quietness, who then can make trouble? In this consisted their likeness to each other. All real Christians resemble one another more or less; the love of Christ constraining them to be always ready to confess him before an evil world, and try and win others to the same happy faith.

Martha never quarrelled with Ruth, as she did with the other girls. She had no heart to say any thing to one so invariably gentle and obliging; and when, after a time, she shunned rather than sought her society, as she had once done, it was only because she feared the mild and loving rebukes which she felt conscious of deserving.

One day Ruth found her weeping over a letter which she had just received from Willie.

"No bad news, I hope," said she, anxiously, for Martha had told her all about him, and read her passages from his letters, until she almost felt as if she knew him.

"No; Willie is quite well. You may read it if you wish it—if you have time, that is,"

"Thank you," said Ruth, "I have nothing to do at present, for a wonder, and I love reading your brother's letters. They are like a book.

"A book of sermons," added Martha, with a sigh.

It was a long letter, crossed and re-crossed, and it took Ruth a long while to read it, and cost her not a few tears and rainbow smiles. It certainly was a beautiful letter, full of love to God and man.

"Well," said Martha, when she had finished.

"Well, Martha dear," replied Ruth, who, although she was very gentle, always spoke the truth fearlessly; "it is plain enough that your brother thinks more highly of you than you deserve. All you have to do is to try and merit his good opinion."

"Ah, it is easy talking."

"I know, dear, that it is easy talking, and very hard to do. But you must not set about it in your own strength; and nothing is impossible with God."

"So Willio used to say."

"He speaks here about the duty of attending public worship. Will you go with me to-morrow, Martha, dear?"

"I do not know. Perhaps I may: but stay—now I think of it, I have promised Charlotte Dendy to spend the day at her cousin's. As she says, we have only one day in the week, and it is hard if we cannot have a little enjoyment in it. But I will go with you some Sunday."

"Did you always attend public worship before you came here?" asked Ruth.

"Not lately—not since Willie left. I used to go regularly with him; but after he was gone away I did not seem to care about it, and no one else went."

"Then it is not because you have only one day in the week, but because you do not care about it. Oh, Martha, there are some solemn verses in the Scriptures about sabbath-breaking."

"Yes, I know; I used to read the Bible once—that is, Willie read it to me. When he left I promised him always to read a chapter night and morning, and so I did, until, as father said, when he thought once of having family prayer, it seemed a mockery in such a house as ours. And now, if Willie only knew how tired I am when I go to bed at night, and how sleepy in the morning, he would not expect it."

"I am tired too," said Ruth, with a sigh ; "so tired that I sometimes think I could scarcely bear it, if it were not for the comfort which I am sure to find in that blessed book. It is a weary life to lead, working from morning till night. But God appoints our station, and its trials, and he will help us to bear them : he does help us." Ruth wiped away her tears, and the old smile came back to her lips as she dwelt in faith upon that sweet promise—"My grace is sufficient for thee : for my strength is made perfect in weakness."

"I have no Bible here," said Martha, after a pause ; "I left mine at home, and do not care to go and fetch it. My stepmother has doubtless locked it up, as she does every thing else ; and it would seem so strange for me to ask her for it."

"Why strange?"

"Because she knows—she must know—that I am not in the habit of reading it, or I should not have done or said what I have to her."

"I am glad you feel that, dear Martha."

"Yes," said Martha, sorrowfully ; "I have long felt that it was best to give it up."

"To give what up?"

"Oh, Ruth, do not look so grave. Whatever my faults may be, and I do not wish to deny them, I am not a hypocrite—only to dear Willie, lest it should grieve him to hear such a sad

account of the little sister whom he so loved and trusted. I cannot read the Bible with my heart full of vain and bitter thoughts. You remember what it says about loving our enemies. It would be of no use my trying to love Mrs. Owen."

"But you might pity and forgive her."

"Forgive her! Was it not her unkindness that drove Willie from his home? Would you believe it, she used to call him Cain, because of the scar upon his forehead. My own good and gentle brother! No, I can never forgive her."

"You must not say that, Martha. You must not give up reading your Bible. What will become of you? Suppose you were to be taken ill and die?"

She was interrupted by a gay laugh from Charlotte Dendy, who had entered the room unperceived.

"How pale you both look!" exclaimed she. "I hope you are neither of you going to be taken ill and die just at present, for there is a large order come in, and Mrs. Turnbull has been inquiring for you. Come, Martha, I see how it is; Ruth has been preaching to you as usual."

"She has only been telling me the truth; and whatever she may do or say," added Martha, "I like her better than all of you put together. But I suppose we had better go, Ruth."

"I should think you had," muttered Charlotte Dendy, "And the next time I come and tell you any thing it shall do you both good."

"But we are much obliged to you for coming to tell us," said Ruth, with one of those sweet smiles which there was no resisting; and passing her arm through Charlotte's, the three girls returned to the work-room together.

CHAPTER X.

It was some days before Martha and Ruth had an opportunity of speaking to one another again. They were working hard to get the order finished. It was a wedding order, and all this toil and hurry was occasioned by its not having been given in time. It was a pity that the young bride could not have been there to witness the effects of her own thoughtlessness—for it was nothing more—in the pale faces and aching eyes of those poor, weary girls, as they laboured early and late in order that the things might be ready by the appointed time. It would have been a lesson to her for life.

As Martha sat over her work, feeling sick and dizzy from having to bend down her head for so many hours, and faint for want of fresh air and exercise, she often called to

mind Ruth's words—"What if you should be taken ill and die?" Poor Martha, there was very little in the world to make her wish to live; but the more she thought the more she felt afraid to die. Sometimes she would try and shake off these sad forebodings, and, looking round upon her companions, console herself with the reflection, that at any rate she was not worse than others, and not so bad as some; for every one knew that Ann Lawrence was a very wicked girl, and Charlotte Dendy but little better. Ruth was the only one among them all who read her Bible, and went on the sabbath day to the house of God. Martha felt that Ruth was right, and that she, and all the rest, were wrong. Knowing and feeling thus, her sin was the greater in not endeavouring to follow Ruth's example, and listen to her affectionate warnings. We are told in the Scriptures, that the servant who knoweth his Lord's will, and doeth it not, shall be "beaten with many stripes" in comparison with those who err through ignorance, having no one, perhaps, to teach them any better.

Mrs. Turnbull was not an unkind mistress. When any of the girls wanted a day's holiday, and they were not too busy, she seldom refused to give it: but she never thought of asking them whither they were going. She was rather pleased than otherwise that.

poor things should have a little amusement; and as long as they did her work, she considered that she had no right to interfere with their pleasures. Perhaps if she had had daughters of her own she might have acted differently.

Once a year there was a public ball given at D——, for which Mrs. Turnbull always purchased tickets for her young people, allowing them due time to prepare their dresses, for she liked to see them look well.

The period at which this ball took place was now drawing near; and Martha, who had never been to, or heard of any thing of the kind, could think and talk of nothing else. But, alas, she had no dress, and no money to buy one; for she had long since spent all her salary, and even drawn upon her employer for more than was yet due. What was to be done? She did not like to apply to her father, for she had an idea that he might not approve of her going; besides it was so long since she had been home. Most of the girls were in the same condition as herself; and those who had money wanted it for their own dresses. Martha knew that Ruth never went to balls, and that she seldom wore any thing but a dark merino dress, or a cheap cotton, and a straw bonnet trimmed in the simplest manner. It was impossible that she could have spent all her salary, which was rather higher than most of the others

had, as Ruth was one of Mrs. Turnbull's best hands. Martha, knowing how good-natured she always was, did not doubt that she would willingly let her have what she wanted, until she was able to repay her. Much to her surprise, however, Ruth told her that she had no money to lend.

"No money! Oh, Ruth, how can you have spent it all?"

"I might ask the same question," replied Ruth, good humouredly.

"You forget," said Martha, "the pretty muslin dress I bought in the summer, and the new bonnet that every one admired so much; and a dozen other things. But you do not seem to have bought any thing."

"I did not want any thing," said Ruth. "I gave the money to my dear mother."

"Ah," thought Martha, "if my mother had lived I might have been like Ruth; but I have no one to work for, no one to care for but myself." And so she lulled her conscience to sleep, and deceived her own heart.

"I am sorry that you cannot let me have the money," said she, "but it is not your fault. It is better employed—only I cannot tell what I am to do for a dress."

"Do without it, dear, and stay at home with me. We shall be so happy together!"

Martha shook her head.

"Were you ever at a dance, Ruth?" asked she.

"No; and what is more, I never wish to go to one."

"But I do, and have set my whole heart upon it. Why do you not wish to go, Ruth?"

"Because my mother does not think a ball a right place for young girls."

"I have no mother," said Martha, sadly.

"But you have a father, and a dear, good brother. Do you think Willie would like your going?"

"I am not sure; and he is too far away for me to write and ask him."

"But you might ask your father."

"Yes, I might certainly, and I would, only that he is sure to consult immediately with Mrs. Owen, who would advise him not to let me go, on purpose to vex me. I wish I knew what to do."

"I have told you," said Ruth, smiling; "stay at home with me."

"Not unless I am obliged," replied Martha.

She never thought of applying to Mrs. Turnbull, who would probably have helped her out of her difficulty; and it seemed likely that she would be obliged to stay at home after all, for want of a dress to go in.

"If I had only a white muslin!" exclaimed Martha, a few days before the ball was to take place. "It would not cost much, and

Charlotte Dendy has offered to lend me a sash."

"I think I could help you," said Ann Lawrence, who happened to be the only person in the room at the time. "But you must promise faithfully not to betray me."

Martha never liked Ann Lawrence; but she had set her heart upon going to the ball, and therefore promised eagerly.

"Some years ago," continued the girl, "I was situated just as you are now; and what do you think I did for a dress?"

"I do not know—stole it perhaps!" exclaimed Martha, impatiently, and shuddering as she spoke.

Ann laughed.

"No, not so bad as that; I borrowed it. There was a large roll of book-muslin always kept in the show-room at the house where I worked, just as there is here, and I took as much as I wanted, and re-placed it to an inch when my next quarter's salary came due. Surely there was no great harm in that."

"I should think not, as you re-placed it again," replied Martha, hesitatingly. "But were you never found out?"

"Never. I took care, of course, that no one saw me take it, and it all came right at last."

"And you would advise my doing the same thing?"

"Not I," said Ann Lawrence, carelessly; it is nothing to me. I have merely told you what I did, as you appeared to be so disappointed at not having a dress."

"Thank you," replied Martha. "I think I will try. I am often in the show-room for hours by myself, and I could easily manage it."

"Remember," observed Ann Lawrence, "your solemn promise not to betray me whatever happens."

"To be sure. But what should happen?"

"You may be found out, that's all, if you are not careful."

"I have a great mind not to run the risk," murmured Martha, "but to give it up, and stay at home with Ruth."

"Just as you please," replied Ann Lawrence. "It is no concern of mine, only it seems a pity, as you have never been to a ball."

At that moment Charlotte Dendy came in to tell them, that as they were not very busy, Mrs. Turnbull intended giving them the whole of the evening to make their dresses in; and that she was now waiting to speak to Martha in the show-room.

"She wants you to set it to rights I believe, and afterwards to go out and make several purchases for her. What a thing it is to be a favourite! I should not wonder if she were to take it into her head to present you with a new dress."



THE SHOW-ROOM.

"Oh, if she would!" thought Martha, as she quitted the room, having first exchanged a rapid glance with Ann Lawrence. It was a pity she did not ask her, for Martha really was a favourite. Mrs. Turnbull liked to have her in the show-room when any customers came, because her appearance set off the bonnets and mantles, which she had to try on, to the best advantage, and Martha was glad not to be obliged to work as hard as the other girls, and gave herself not a few airs in consequence. None of her companions really liked her; and most of them were secretly pleased at the idea of her having to stay at home from the ball, all but Charlotte Dendy, who was as good-natured as she was weak and thoughtless.

CHAPTER XI.

WHEN the evening came, and the rest of the girls brought forth their dresses, Martha produced the white muslin which she had procured for hers, and began to cut it out. So busy was she at her task, that she never even looked up while Ruth stood beside her admiring its texture, and wondering how she came by it.

"Do you think every one is like you,"

asked Ann Lawrence, "afraid either to spend money on themselves, or lend it to others?"

"Ruth had a good reason for not lending her money," said Martha, in a low voice, and without lifting her head.

"Are you not well, Martha dear?" asked Ruth affectionately.

"Yes, quite well. What should make you think otherwise?"

"Only your hands tremble so."

"She does not tremble, or look half so bad as you do," interrupted Ann Lawrence.

"Very likely, for I have a terrible headache, and am going to bed."

"I am sorry you are ill, Ruth, said Martha. "Shall I go up stairs with you, and help you to undress?"

"No, thank you, I am not so bad as that. Besides, you have a long evening's work before you. Good night, dear."

"Good night," said Martha. "I hope you will be better in the morning."

"I am glad she is gone," exclaimed Ann Lawrence, as the door closed.

"And I am glad that she is going to have a good night's rest for once, poor thing!" said Charlotte Dendy. "I wish I was; but pride deserves to feel pain."

About half an hour afterwards, Martha, having occasion to go up-stairs to fetch something she wanted, found Ruth sitting reading her Bible.

"What, not in bed yet!" exclaimed she.

"I have done now," said Ruth, closing the book, "for my head is very bad. I hope you do not think me unkind, Martha, for not congratulating you about your new dress; but it would not be speaking the truth. I had rather that you had never had it; and then we could have remained at home together."

"So would I now," replied Martha. "Oh, much, much rather! But it is too late."

"Why should it be too late?" asked Ruth, surprised at the earnestness with which she spoke.

"Because it would be a thousand pities to waste that pretty dress—and after all that I have gone through to procure it."

"Did Ann Lawrence lend you the money?"

"No; what made you think of her? And now, I am not going to answer any more questions; so lie down and go to sleep."

"Ruth closed her eyes like a weary child, while Martha crept away, with a heavy heart, and left her to her repose.

Charlotte Dendy had decided upon wearing her last year's dress, which was scarcely soiled. She had nothing to do, therefore, but trim it with fresh ribbons, having accomplished which, she good-naturedly offered to help Martha with hers.

"What a nice muslin!" exclaimed she.
"How much did you give a yard for it?"

"I do not know," replied Martha—"that is, I forget."

"Well, at any rate you need not colour so about it. One would think you had stolen it!" And Charlotte laughed merrily.

"How strangely you talk, Charlotte."

"And how strangely you look, Martha. I only said that it was a very nice muslin, and so it is; but you might have got one for half the price, which would have suited your purpose just as well."

"You should have told me that before," said Martha.

"And so I would if I had known you were going to buy a dress: but it is too late now; and this will hang beautifully, because of its softness."

"Yes, I think it will look very well—with your sash, Charlotte."

"To be sure. I will not forget the sash. I am glad that you are going with us after all."

"Thank you," replied Martha, "you are very kind."

It was late before they went to bed. Ruth was sound asleep.

"How happy she looks!" observed Charlotte Dendy, in a whisper.

"You might have been asleep too by this time," said Martha, "if you had not sat up to help me."

"I was not thinking of that," replied Charlotte, with a sigh

Martha was too tired to say any more ; her head and fingers ached with working so much. But it was the heart-ache that kept her awake for so many weary hours. She would have given all the world, if she had possessed it, to recall the events of that day. "Ann Lawrence," thought she, "when she took the muslin, was sure of being able to re-place it with her next quarter's salary ; but mine, although I forgot it at the time, is already over-drawn. If I apply to my father, he will ask what I want the money for ; and it is so long since I have been home that I hardly like to go now. I cannot tell what to do. I wish the ball had never been mentioned. If Willie only knew what a wicked girl his little sister has become, it would break his heart. But God knows every thing."

"What is the matter?" exclaimed Ruth, aroused by her bitter weeping. "Martha, dear, you are dreaming."

"Oh, if it were but a dream!" thought the poor girl. "If I could only wake up!"

"Do you hear, Martha?—What makes you moan and cry so?"

"It is nothing. Go to sleep again, Ruth. I am sorry I disturbed you."

"You could not help it. I dream myself sometimes, but not often. It will be daylight soon."

"Yes, very soon." And Martha lay quite

still, and listened to her calm and gentle breathing as she gradually sank into slumber. But there was no sleep for her; only sad thoughts and vain regrets. She was glad when the time came for them to get up.

"Take care, Martha," observed Ann Lawrence, the following morning, when she saw her looking so pale and ill, or you will not be able to wear your pretty dress after all. And then what should you say?"

"I should say that it was a judgment," replied Martha, sadly.

"Is it possible," exclaimed her companion, casting a hasty glance round the room, to ascertain that there was no one to overhear them—"Is it possible that you have been fretting because you took the muslin?"

"I cannot help it," said Martha. "I never felt so miserable in my life."

"What nonsense! Of course you mean to re-place it some day. I am sure I wish that I had never told you."

"So do I, with all my heart."

"Remember," said Ann Lawrence, "that I have your solemn promise not to betray me; for if you go on in this way you will certainly betray yourself."

"Has Mrs. Turnbull said any thing?" asked Martha, with a frightened look.

"What should she say, simpleton?"

"I do not know—only I thought—I was afraid—"

"Oh, Martha," interrupted her companion, "I thought you had more courage. You who are always giving yourself so many airs."

"It takes a great deal of courage to do wrong," said Martha.

"You will soon get used to it," observed her companion, carelessly, "and grow quite hardened."

"God forbid!" exclaimed the poor girl. "God in his mercy forbid!"

Ann murmured something about not knowing that Martha was religious. "How should I," asked she, "when you have never been to any place of worship since you came?"

"I know it," replied Martha. "I have been very wicked. I have forsaken God; and now I fear that God has forsaken me!"

"Silence," exclaimed Ann Lawrence, in a whisper, "unless you wish Mrs. Turnbull to know all."

"Perhaps it would be better than to go on deceiving her."

"Silence, I say. Are you aware that she could transport you for life for stealing that muslin? Hush, not a word, she is here." And the girl went forward to meet Mrs. Turnbull, with the unembarrassed countenance of one who had indeed grown hardened, as she called it, in sin.

"Martha Owen is not well to-day," said she. "I was just coming to ask you +

excuse her going into the work-room this morning."

"She does not look well. Do not cry, child. Of course you cannot work if you are ill. Go and lie down for an hour."

"I do not understand that girl," said Ann Lawrence, when she was gone. "I cannot help thinking that she has something on her mind. She was crying and moaning all last night."

"Poor child!" said Mrs. Turnbull; "I wonder what it can be."

"I only hope that she has done nothing wrong," continued Ann Lawrence, shaking her head.

"What do you mean? What can she have done wrong?"

Ann sighed, or rather pretended to sigh, and declined answering any questions.

"Is it possible?" thought Mrs. Turnbull. "But no—I will not believe it. The fact is they are all jealous of that poor girl, because she happens to be good-looking. But I will watch her nevertheless."

CHAPTER XII.

MARTHA went to the ball; but though both she and her dress were much admired, she felt depressed. The memory of the past too

was not easily blotted out from the minds of her companions. Her apparent humility, proceeding from a consciousness of what she had done, was mistaken for pride. And when she good-naturedly offered to find a partner for one of them who had sat still all the evening, the girl told her, with a sneer, that she was obliged by her condescension, but that she had no wish to be patronized, especially by her. The notice Mrs. Turnbull took of her increased their dislike, and she felt lonely and out of place. Even Charlotte Dendy avoided her; and she was glad when the time came to return home. The following morning, when Ruth asked her how she had enjoyed herself, she told her that she never wished to go to another ball as long as she lived.

Martha had written to her father, requesting him to lend her a small sum of money, as she wanted it for a very particular purpose; and that it would make her quite happy if he would let her have it as soon as possible. She knew if she said that, he would be sure and send it immediately, and so he would; but unfortunately the letter fell into the hands of Mrs. Owen, who threw it into the fire, without saying any thing to her husband on the subject.

"This will never do!" exclaimed she. "What can a young girl like Martha want borrowing money? I will take very good

care that she gets none here to spend on her fine clothes."

Every day Martha expected an answer to her letter; and the hope of shortly being able to re-place the muslin cheered and comforted her. When Sunday came, much to Ruth's surprise, she asked permission to accompany her to public worship.

"I should like it so much," said she, "if you will let me."

"To be sure I will, with the greatest pleasure."

"I was afraid," said Martha, "that you might not care to be seen with me in this gay bonnet. I have taken the flower off the outside. I wish I had something neater to wear."

"Never mind," replied Ruth with a smile. "I dare say no one will look at your bonnet."

"I am not so sure of that," said her companion, whose vanity was slightly wounded by the remark. "At any rate I feel that it is not the sort of bonnet to go in. I will buy one like yours next time. I am tired of finery; it only tempts one to do what one ought not."

"I am glad to hear you say that," exclaimed Ruth.

It was a pleasant walk to the church, which stood a little way out of the town. The sound of the bells reminded Martha of

many a broken sabbath in which she had listened afar off to their warning voice, and then forgotten it again amidst the foolish mirth of vain and worldly companions. It brought back also the remembrance of her childhood. Instead of that quaint old market town, she seemed to be crossing the wooden bridge, and following the windings of the clear, bright stream, with Willie by her side, carrying her little books, as he always used. On they went, in her day-dreams, over the stile, and through the wicket gate, into the churchyard; and then they turned aside amidst the long grass, and knelt down hand in hand beside their mother's grave.

She was aroused by Ruth gently touching her arm; and when she looked up she was in a strange church, surrounded by strange faces, and Willie far away. But what was worse than all, she was no longer an innocent child, but an outcast, through her own ungovernable temper, from her father's house; a sabbath-breaker, and a thief! At that moment there arose amidst the silence, a clear, solemn voice, and Martha stood up with the rest to listen to it.

“When the wicked man turneth away from his wickedness that he hath committed, and doeth that which is lawful and right, he shall save his soul alive,” Ezek. xviii. 27.

“If we say that we have no sin, we

deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness," 1 John i. 8, 9.

It appeared to Martha as if every prayer that was said had reference to her own peculiar condition. It is often thus when the Holy Spirit brings them home to our hearts. They came back to her like an old familiar voice heard long ago. They upbraided her with having forsaken the service of God. They spoke to her of neglected privileges, and lost opportunities ; of her own sinfulness, and the patience and long suffering of her heavenly Father. They condemned ; and yet they spoke of comfort to her, for they were full of Christ. The prayer for all that travel by land or by water found a deep echo in her heart. It seemed as if every one in the church was praying for Willie. Sabbath after sabbath ever since he went away it had been thus ; while she, the sister whom he so tenderly loved, now prayed for him for the first time.

The sermon was short, and eloquent in its very simplicity. A child might have understood it ; and the wisest philosopher could scarcely fail to be benefited by it. The minister selected for his text a part of the seventh verse of the fifty-second chapter of Isaiah :—" How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good

tidings, that publisheth peace :” good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people ; peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.

“It may be,” said the preacher, “that there are some here who have never heard these good tidings—or worse still, have forgotten them: ‘aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, strangers from the covenants of promise; having no hope, and without God in the world.’ For such there can be no peace: ‘There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked:’ no peace out of Christ. It may be that there are some present who are afraid to come to Jesus. Fear not, poor sinner! He is able and willing to save you; he waits to be gracious. It is he who sends you this day good tidings of great salvation, through faith in his name. It is he who offers you this sweet peace—peace in believing. ‘Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters, and he that hath no money: come ye, buy, and eat; yea, come, buy wine and milk without money and without price,’ Isaiah lv. 1.—‘Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest,’ Matt. xi. 28. Come to Jesus.”

Martha felt as if God had indeed sent this beautiful gospel message for her. Many were the good resolutions which she made; but she was afraid to say much about them, even to Ruth, remembering with shame how

often she had done the same thing before. But they were no longer formed in her own strength. She was beginning to feel that of herself she could nothing; and to draw nearer to Him from whom cometh every good thought, and who can alone help us to keep those better resolutions which are the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts. How long had Martha struggled against this blessed influence! What need had she to pray, "Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy Holy Spirit from me!"

CHAPTER XIII.

AFTER a time, Martha began to grow uneasy at not receiving any answer to her letter, and to fear that her father must be ill; and, sorry as she was now to miss going to church with Ruth, she resolved to walk over on the following Sunday, and see what was the matter at home. She told Ann Lawrence what she had done, who called her a fool for her pains, and said that there was no hurry about the muslin, if she did not re-place it for the next six months, for Mrs. Turnbull would never find it out.

"Only one day more," thought Martha, as she arose on Saturday morning. "I am sure that my father will lend me the money ;

and oh, what a weight it will be off my mind!"

Alas! we little know what a day may bring forth. Mrs. Turnbull looked up as Martha entered the work-room, where the rest of the girls were already assembled, and her face was pale and stern.

"You are not wanted," said she. "Go back to your own apartment, and remain there until you are sent for."

Martha cast a startled glance around the little group. Ruth turned away her head and wept bitterly; and she guessed from her tears, and the cold, averted countenances of her companions, what had happened. Not daring to speak before them all, she obeyed in silence, feeling almost glad to escape for a time to the solitude of her own chamber. As she passed out, Ann Lawrence, who was standing near the door, slipped a piece of paper into her hand unperceived, upon which she had hastily written a few words—"If I were you I would run away; an hour hence you may not have the chance. All is discovered."

Martha's heart sank within her as she read. For a moment she felt half tempted to follow her advice; but where was she to go? "No," thought she, "it is better to remain and tell her the truth, and, perhaps, after a time she will forgive me. I know I shall have to bear a great deal, but not more

than I deserve; and Ruth, dear Ruth, will believe, and stand my friend."

When Martha was gone, Mrs. Turnbull proceeded with her inquiries. It appeared that she had missed several things lately from the show-room, and among the rest a quantity of valuable blonde. That morning she discovered that several yards had been cut off the different pieces of velvet which were kept for customers to choose their bonnets from, as well as a great deal of white muslin, which first led her to suspect Martha.

Ann Lawrence reminded Charlotte Dendy of Martha's evident confusion while she was helping her to make the dress, and which others had also noticed. Most of the girls recollected her anxiety to procure a dress for the ball, and her having wanted to borrow money of them for that purpose; but denied having lent her any, for the best of all possible reasons, that they had none to lend. Upon being questioned on the subject, Ruth said that she always thought Ann Lawrence had done so; for she could not get it out of her head that the girl had something to do with poor Martha's disgrace.

"Even if I had been able," replied Ann, "I should never have dreamt of doing any such thing, for I never liked her well enough. I always had my suspicions about Martha Owen." And she put Mrs. Turnbull in mind of the conversation they had had

together a day or two before the ball; and how she had told her that she was afraid Martha had something on her mind.

Mrs. Turnbull perfectly remembered it; and that she would not believe her, but had made excuses for Martha in her heart, because she was so young; and how she had trusted her in the show-room hours and hours by herself, and afforded her every facility for disposing of the stolen goods by sending her out so frequently. The more she thought over her own blind indulgence, the more exasperated she became against Martha. It was not until she entered the room, a few hours afterwards, accompanied by the person who had been sent for to search her boxes, that the poor girl had any idea how seriously things had turned out.

"Oh, Mrs. Turnbull," exclaimed Martha, "surely you do not think I am a thief! It is true that I took the muslin, but I intended to have re-placed it—indeed I did. I have been miserable ever since, and have written to ask my father to lend me the money. If you will only wait until Monday! if you will only forgive me this once, I will never touch any thing again as long as I live."

"I shall take good care that you never have the chance," replied Mrs. Turnbull, coldly. "You have heard enough, Mr. O'Connor, to warrant your taking Martha Owen into custody, and I am determin-

to prosecute her to the utmost. But you have not yet examined the boxes."

A strange feeling came over Martha, at those cruel words. O'Connor stood before her and spoke; he was asking for the key, but his voice sounded a long way off, and she could not understand what he said. She thought herself dying, and felt afraid, but it was only a fainting fit. O'Connor opened the window and bathed her face with water.

"Are you sure it is real?" asked Mrs. Turnbull.

Just then Martha opened her eyes, and not knowing where she was, murmured softly, "God be merciful to me a sinner, for Christ's sake." It was a little prayer that Ruth had taught her.

"Poor child!" said O'Connor, compassionately; "she is not quite hardened." He was glad to hear her pray.

"What does she say?" asked Mrs. Turnbull.

"Hush, she is speaking to God."

"Where am I?" asked Martha, after a pause. And then, as recollection slowly returned, she covered her face with her hands and burst into tears.

The boxes were searched in vain; there was nothing found in them which Mrs. Turnbull could identify as her own, save the unfortunate dress. While she was still turning over the contents, O'Connor approached

Martha, and advised her, in a whisper, to confess at once what she had done with the blonde and velvet, and then perhaps Mrs. Turnbull might be induced to let her off.

"Blonde! velvet!" repeated the bewildered girl; "I never took any thing but the muslin."

O'Connor turned away with a disappointed air.

"Of what am I accused?" asked Martha, after a pause. "Surely I have a right to know that."

Mrs. Turnbull slowly enumerated the things which she had missed.

"At first," said she, "it was only a linen collar, or a few yards of ribbon. I thought I must have been mistaken, and began to mark the things, and to keep a stricter watch—not that I suspected you—no, not even after I had been warned. But it will be a lesson to me for life."

"Indeed, indeed!" exclaimed Martha, wringing her hands, "I did not take any thing except the muslin. But I have been a very wicked girl, and am rightly punished."

"I am glad to hear you confess it."

"I confess nothing," replied Martha, quickly, "but the sinful pride which has led to all this shame and misery. It was that made me steal the dress—not that I meant to steal it. Oh, if you had only waited till Monday, till I had seen my father!"

"And the velvet and blonde, and all the other things—would your father have paid for them?"

"I know nothing about them," replied Martha, sorrowfully. "I only took the muslin."

"You had better put on your bonnet," replied Mrs. Turnbull, coldly; "Mr. O'Connor is waiting."

Martha sat down by the open window; she could not stand. The same sick feeling came over her again; but she strove against it. She heard O'Connor speaking in a low voice to Mrs. Turnbull, and asking if she was quite sure that no one else could have taken the things.

"I have known that girl's father," said he, "ever since I was a boy, and her mother also—her first mother; and a more honest, hard-working couple never lived."

"I have always understood so," replied Mrs. Turnbull. "It was that which first induced me to take her and trust her as I did."

"Suppose," said O'Connor, "I were to go over and ask Mr. Owen if he has received any letter lately from his daughter. I need not enter into particulars; and the fact would serve to prove whether she has spoken the truth."

"Do you know how far it is from here?"

"That is nothing," replied the good-natured Irishman.

"And what is to be done with the girl during your absence?"

"She is safe enough here, if you lock the door."

"Do as you please," said Mrs. Turnbull; "but I fear that you are giving yourself unnecessary trouble."

"We shall see," said O'Connor. As he turned round, Martha's eyes met his full of grateful tears.

"Did you hear what we have been saying?" asked Mrs. Turnbull. "I thought you had fainted again."

"Yes, I heard every word," replied Martha. "God bless you, sir," added she, addressing O'Connor; "God bless you for your kindness."

"Come, Mr. O'Connor," exclaimed Mrs. Turnbull, impatiently; "there has been too much time lost already." And they both went out and locked the door after them, leaving Martha alone.

CHAPTER XIV.

O'CONNOR met Mr. Owen a short distance from his own house; and after talking for some little time about other things, said with affected carelessness—

"By the by, I saw your little daughter this morning at Mrs. Turnbull's—Martha I think they called her."

"Yes, Martha; it was her poor mother's name. She is well, I hope."

"I believe so. You had a letter from her the other day, had you not?"

"I never had a letter from her in my life," replied Mr. Owen. "Not but what she is a very good scholar, and Willie too. But she has had nothing to write about."

"You are sure that you have received no letter?"

"Quite sure."

"Perhaps I ought not to mention it, but I think that she wanted you to lend her some money."

"Poor child, to be sure I will. She should have come and asked me herself. You do not happen to know how much she wanted?"

"No," said O'Connor, "I do not. I dare say it was in the letter."

"But I have received no letter. If you are likely to see Martha again, will you tell her so; and that she shall have whatever she wants."

"I shall see her this evening," replied O'Connor, "and will deliver your message." He shook hands with Mr. Owen, and was going away; but the latter detained him.

"There is nothing the matter with Mar-

tha?" said he, in a low voice. "She is not ill, is she?"

"Not that I know of."

"You would tell me if she was, O'Connor, would you not? I am uneasy about her at times, poor child. I am sorry now that I ever consented to her leaving home, but she appeared to wish it so much. We never see her now on Sundays;—but I must not keep you, as you seem in such a hurry this morning."

O'Connor was glad to get away. "Mrs. Turnbull was right," murmured he, as he prepared to return to D——; "and I might have spared myself this long walk. Poor Owen, how I pity him!"

All this time Martha sat alone in her little room, longing for his return. She thought a great deal that day—more than she had ever done in her life before. And she not only thought but prayed, which comforted her, as true prayer always does. However the matter might end, she saw before her a long season of bitter trial, but not longer or worse than she had deserved, and she asked God to help her to bear it. Supposing Mrs. Turnbull were to forgive her, and suffer her to remain, she would not trust her again as she had done; and the girls would be for ever taunting her with the past, for none loved her. She had never tried to win their affections. But Ruth would never taunt her;

Ruth loved her, and would stand her friend, and advise her, and pray with her and for her. After a time, perhaps, whoever it was that had stolen the things would be found out—just as she had been found out, and then every one would be sorry for having doubted her.

“But it may be,” thought Martha, “that they will send me away; and I shall have to go home in disgrace, and bear all my mother-in-law’s hard speeches. But my father will not believe me guilty. And then there is dear little Susan. Every Sunday I will take her to church; and by and by, perhaps, we can persuade my father to accompany us. We may be very happy yet. If my mother-in-law is unkind, it is because I have not behaved well to her. She will be less harsh when she finds that I no longer answer or provoke her. And I will try not; I will try to bear it. After all, it is only for a few years, and then Willie will come back and take me away to his own home. Dear Willie! I will write to-morrow and tell him all the truth.” In the midst of her day-dreams the door opened, and Mrs. Turnbull and O’Connor entered. The latter appeared tired and out of temper.

“Put on your bonnet,” said Mrs. Turnbull, in a stern voice.

Martha obeyed her with trembling fingers.

“Am I going home?” asked she, looking at O’Connor.

"You would have no home," answered he, "if I were your father."

"But the letter!" exclaimed Martha, gasping for breath.

"There was no letter sent or received."

"God help me!" exclaimed the poor girl.

"God will not help those who do not speak the truth. I saw your father myself. It was the first time he had ever heard of a letter, or of your wanting money."

"Does he know—did you tell him?"

"No," replied O'Connor, abruptly; "I had not the heart. He will learn soon enough."

"He is right," murmured poor Martha, "God will not help me; I am too wicked!" She put on her shawl mechanically, and followed O'Connor from the room. Even Mrs. Turnbull was touched by the silent agony depicted on her young face.

"Give me back my blonde and velvet," said she, "and I will let you off."

"I do not know any thing about them," replied the bewildered girl; "I told you so before. I only took the muslin."

Mrs. Turnbull moved away without another word. That night Martha was lodged in jail, to be brought before a magistrate.

"It serves her right," said Charlotte Dendy; "she was always giving herself airs. But to pretend to be religious was worse than every thing else. I could have forgiven

her all but that—and yet, somehow, I cannot help being sorry for her.”

“It was no more than I expected from the first,” observed Ann Lawrence. “I told Mrs. Turnbull so, but she did not choose to believe me.”

“So much the better!” exclaimed Charlotte; “I hate tale-bearers. I was grieved to be obliged to say what I did against her, although to be sure she never seemed to care what she did and said against us.”

Ruth did not speak; she was trying to think what she could do.

Martha wrote a few lines to her father, telling him what had happened, and imploring him not to think evil of her for her dead mother’s sake; which O’Connor undertook to send.

“I think I can promise,” said he, “that this shall go safer than the last did.”

Martha thanked him without noticing the sneer.

“I hope you have told your father the truth,” added he.

“Yes, indeed; I have kept nothing from him. He at least will believe me.”

A few hours afterwards Martha received back her letter unopened. O’Connor turned back at the sound of her wailing cry.

“Poor child!” exclaimed he; “be calm. What has happened?”

“What you said would happen,” replied

Martha. "He will not even read it.—He casts me off.—I have no father, no home, no one to love or care for me ; no hope, and without God in the world !"

"Hush, you must not say that."

"Did you not tell me that he would not help me?—No hope, and without God in the world !" As Martha repeated these words, she suddenly recollected where she had last heard them ; and the sweet promises by which they had been followed stole back to her heart, "Fear not, poor sinner, God is able and willing to save you. He waits to be gracious. 'Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.' Come to Jesus."

CHAPTER XV.

WHEN Mrs. Turnbull heard from O'Connor how ill and changed Martha was, and how her father had cast her off, her heart was softened. But what was to be done? She could not have her back again, and there was no other place for her to go to.

"The best plan," observed O'Connor, "would be to send her to the hospital."

"But they will not keep her after she is recovered."

"I do not believe that she will ever recover," replied O'Connor, in a low voice.

The conversation had taken place in the work-room; and when he spoke thus, the girls looked at one another and turned pale, especially Ann Lawrence.

"What is the matter with her?" asked Mrs. Turnbull.

"I do not know; I think it must be a fever. She talks a great deal to herself, and looks very wild and strange, poor thing."

Ruth laid down her work and came quietly forward.

"If you have no objection," said she to Mrs. Turnbull, "Martha Owen can be taken to our house, and my mother will nurse her."

"You hear, child, that Mr. O'Connor says she has a fever."

"What then?"

"Only that fevers are sometimes contagious."

"We shall not take it unless it is God's will," replied Ruth.

"And your mother?"

"She thinks as I do. We were talking it over last night, and I intended asking you to-day."

"Of course, I can have no objection," said Mrs. Turnbull. "I am glad that the girl has somewhere to go. But I thought—I always understood—that your mother was not so well off as formerly."

"If she had been," replied Ruth, with a

sigh, "she would not have suffered me to come here."

"I shall not want you to-day," said Mrs. Turnbull to Ruth, after a pause. "You can go back with Mr. O'Connor, if you like, and get her removed at once. I hope nothing will happen to the poor child. After all, she is only a child. It was a pity she did not tell me the truth at the time, and then I should have let her off. There will be many little expenses," continued she, following Ruth to the door, and slipping some money into her hand. "You must let me do something."

Ruth had no false pride, so she thanked her, and put the money into her pocket. She was glad, for Martha's sake, to hear Mrs. Turnbull speak so kindly. If she recovered it might be of service to her; if not—"but she will not die," thought the young girl, "we will take such care of her, and my dear mother is an excellent nurse. Please God, we will save her yet."

And it pleased God; and Martha did not die. But she was very near it, and was obliged to have all her hair cut off. Ruth could not help weeping when she saw it done, but Martha never shed a tear. She only asked that some of it might be kept for Willie; at which Ruth sobbed aloud, and was obliged to leave the room until she was more composed.

For many weeks Martha hovered, as it were, between life and death; she heard them moving and speaking around her without being able to distinguish who they were, or what they said. Now and then Ruth's pale face smiled through the surrounding mist, but it was only for a moment. It was sad to hear her moaning and talking to herself, by the hour together, of all that had happened years ago, when she was a child; but sadder still when those pleasant remembrances changed into scenes of angry recrimination and passionate strife. After a time the fever passed away; and Martha knew and thanked those kind and watchful nurses, to whom, under God, she owed her life. But she was still very weak, and the memory of the past came slowly back like the recollection of a dream.

"How fortunate," said she, one day, "that Mrs. Turnbull should have discovered who it was stole her things—fortunate for me, I mean—or I might still have been in prison. She would never have believed me, and I had not deserved that she should."

Ruth and her mother exchanged a look of glad intelligence. They had had no time yet to wonder whether Martha was guilty or not; they only knew that she was ill and friendless, with no one in the world to love or care for her. Mrs. Eggleton gently explained how matters stood.

"And must I go back to prison when I am better?" asked Martha, with a look of terror.

"I hope not. Mrs. Turnbull was very sorry when she heard of your illness, and has declined taking any further proceedings against you."

"And does she—do they still think that I am a thief?"

Mrs. Eggleton turned away her head.

"But you do not think so?"

"No, my dear, I do not."

"Thank you," replied Martha, humbly. "And Ruth too will believe me, I can see by her smile—and Willie—Ruth, why do you turn away? Willie never thought evil of any one in his life. Wicked as I have been, I am sure of his love."

"I did not mean—I was not thinking of that," said Ruth, in a low voice.

"Forgive me," replied Martha; "I am very foolish. But I seem to have no one but Willie now in all the world. His love is every thing to me."

"Let us try and look above the world," said Mrs. Eggleton, gently: and she opened her little Bible and read of God's love.

Ruth always spent the whole of the sabbath day with her mother, besides returning home every evening when her work was done. Mrs. Turnbull was very anxious during the time that Martha

remained so ill; but when the danger was over she ceased to inquire after her, and was almost sorry that she had consented to let her off so easily. She took care, however, from that time, that nothing of the kind should ever happen again; and the strict watchfulness that was henceforth kept over the establishment increased the bitterness with which the name of Martha Owen was always mentioned among her late companions.

Martha's recovery was slow and lingering. She suffered much from pain and exceeding weakness, and the future was dark before her; and yet she was never so happy in all her life. Oh what a happy time it is when the young believer can first say, although with tears, "Jesus is mine! My sins, which were many, are forgiven me for his name's sake." We may be poor in this world's goods, but if believers we are rich in his love. We may be sorrowful in ourselves, but we must be joyful in him. We may be weak, but we know that he is strong. How can we be friendless, when Jesus is our Friend? How can we be lonely? He will never leave us nor forsake us. Are we weary? let us rest in him, and say, Blessed be the Lord my strength, my goodness, my fortress, my high tower, and my deliverer, my shield, and he in whom I trust—"The Lord our righteousness!"

All is well, all must needs be well, when we can say this. We retrace the path by which we have been led with adoring gratitude. We learn to thank God for dark and stormy days which drove us to seek for shelter and to take refuge in the Rock of ages. Looking back, we remember the first dawning of the Sun of righteousness in our hearts, and the many things which stood like shadows between it and us; and how God, in his mercy, removed them one by one.

"I have been thinking," said Martha, one day, to her kind friend Mrs. Eggleton, "that if I had been able to re-place the muslin as I wished, and Mrs. Turnbull had never found me out, I should soon have forgotten all about it, and gone on just as I did before. But now I do hope, I do think, I can never forget what has passed."

"And then you have a new motive," said Mrs. Eggleton, "a new strength—the constraining love of Christ. How shall I sin against such a Saviour?"

"But I knew all that before. I have known it ever since I was a child. It is that which increases my sin."

"You knew it perhaps, but you did not realize—you did not feel it. You could not say, 'My Saviour.' There is a great difference between head knowledge and heart knowledge: the one may make us wiser, but the other must make us better. If we could

always bear in mind and in our hearts what the Lord Jesus Christ has suffered for us, it would keep us from grieving him."

"Ah, if we could!"

"It is because we wish this, and because we cannot always do it, that Jesus is so precious. Do you remember, Ruth, asking me years ago, when you first began to believe, how you could be sure that God loved you? It seemed too great a happiness."

"Yes," answered Ruth, "I remember it well. The same question will arise even now, at times, when I think of my own sinfulness and short-comings."

"Oh, Ruth," interrupted Martha, with the tears in her eyes, "what are your sins compared to mine? But go on, if you please, I want to hear the answer."

"The only reply my mother made," continued Ruth, "was, Do you love God?"

"And then you said, of course, How can I help it? How can I help loving him who has done so much for me?"

Ruth smiled, and turned over the leaves of her little Bible until she came to the fourth chapter of the first Epistle of John. There was a pencil-mark opposite the nineteenth verse, and a slight stain, as if tears had fallen upon the page. If so, they must have been happy tears, for the words were full of comfort—"We love him, because he first loved us."

“‘He first loved us,’” repeated Mrs. Eggleton. “What a beautiful thought!” And taking the Bible from Ruth, she opened it at the eighth chapter of Romans, the latter part of which she read aloud—

“‘Who shall lay anything to the charge of God’s elect? It is God that justifieth. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.’”

CHAPTER XVI.

NOTWITHSTANDING the pains they took to conceal it from her, Martha could not help noticing the many little sacrifices and privations which Mrs. Eggleton and her daughter cheerfully endured, in order to be able to meet the expenses necessarily attendant on a lingering illness. As soon as she could hold a pen, she again wrote to her father, asking him to let her come home. The lines were feebly traced, and touching from their deep humility. She told him of her long and dangerous illness, and the kindness of those dear friends to whom, under God, she owed her life, and how differently she would behave henceforth, if he would only forgive and receive her again; adding, that if he was still too angry to see her after what had passed, and she confessed that she had deserved it should be so, perhaps he would kindly send her a little money, until she was strong enough to earn something for herself. When Martha had finished her letter, she put it into Ruth's hand, and eagerly watched her countenance as she read it.

"Will it do?" asked she. "Do you think my father will forgive me?"

"Yes, I hope so. I feel almost sure that he will; especially now, when his heart is softened by affliction."

"What affliction?" inquired Martha. "But I need not ask you. Oh, if my own dear mother had lived to have seen this day! But she would have believed me—she would not have cast me off. And my father will believe me after a time. If not, I must try and bear my punishment as well as I can."

"You are tired," said Ruth.

"Yes, a little thing tires me now. I am afraid I cannot write to Willie to-day; but perhaps it will be as well to wait until I hear from my father, for I mean to tell him all from the very beginning. I will have no more concealments. Sometimes," continued Martha, after a pause, during which she had leaned back wearily in her chair, "I have such beautiful dreams you cannot think, all about you and your dear mother and Willie. I wonder whether they will ever come true."

"Dreams seldom do," said Ruth, sadly.

"But I am not so silly as I was once, when I really believed that Willie would return an admiral, at least, and fetch me away in a coach and six. Now I only want a little quiet home where we may be always together, with an extra room for you and your dear mother, when you come to stay with us, which must be very often. Oh, Ruth, we shall be so happy!"

Ruth turned away her head.

"You are not afraid of Willie, are you?" continued her companion. "Why, he sends

his love to you even now, and what will he say when he comes to hear of all your kindness to me? But if he loves you ever so much I promise not to be jealous. We must have a little garden—I have set my mind upon that. You like flowers, don't you, Ruth? Besides, it will be such a nice amusement in the summer time. And when the long winter nights come, Willie shall read aloud while we work, or tell us all about the different countries he has visited; and every morning and evening we will have family prayer—do you hear what I am saying, Ruth?"

"Yes," replied Ruth, who looked very pale; "I hear."

"Of all those happy days," continued Martha, "Sunday shall be the happiest.—But where are you going?" added she, as the young girl rose abruptly, and crossing the room to where her mother sat, said something to her in a low voice, to which Mrs. Eggleton replied—

"Yes, it is time that she knew all."

"All what?" asked Martha. "How pale you both look, and how you tremble! What has happened? You need not be afraid to tell me—I am getting quite strong now, and can bear anything, but—"

"There must be no buts, dearest," said Mrs. Eggleton, kneeling down beside her—and then Martha began to tremble also.

"It is not about Willie, is it?" asked she, in an agitated voice.

"Be calm, my child."

"Yes, I will be very calm. Now tell me—when did you hear from him? Has he been ill—very ill? Do not weep so, dear Ruth, we shall have another letter soon to say that he is better. I too have been ill. My own darling brother! Was it a fever, like mine? Did he suffer much?"

"No," answered Mrs. Eggleton, "it was not a fever—but one dark, stormy night, he fell overboard, and—"

"And they took him up of course," interrupted Martha, gasping for breath—"no wonder he was ill after that."

"The night was very dark," continued Mrs. Eggleton, "and the ship flying before the wind—"

"Well, what then?—Go on, for pity's sake."

"My poor child, there is nothing more to tell. It pleased God to take your dear brother thus suddenly to himself. Willie is now in heaven."

It was a long time before Martha recovered from the deadly swoon that came over her at these words, so that they almost feared that life had fled for ever; and yet, if she had died then, they would have scarcely grieved for her. By and by Martha opened her eyes and said smilingly—

"Willie is in heaven. He cannot return to me, but I may go to him. Thanks be to

God who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ !”

Martha had a slight return of the fever, and it was nearly a week before she was again able to leave her bed. One night, Mrs. Eggleton heard her talking to herself in her old rambling way, as she thought; but Martha knew her, when she spoke and asked her if she wanted anything.

“No, thank you; I was only trying to say it—but I cannot.”

“To say what, dear?”

“‘Our Father which art in heaven, Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come—I stop there—I cannot go any further—I cannot say, ‘Thy will be done.’—Oh, my brother! my own darling brother!’”

Mrs. Eggleton spoke soothingly, and then read and prayed with her, until she grew calmer. What a well-spring of consolation is the Bible in the time of trouble—yea, at all times !

When Martha got better, they gave her a small sealed packet, which had arrived during her illness. The poor girl tore it open with trembling fingers—it was her last hope; as she did so, a sovereign dropped out and fell upon the ground. There was nothing else—not a line or a word.

“God help you, my poor child,” said Mrs. Eggleton: “and he will, according to his own gracious promise, ‘I will never leave

thee, nor forsake thee,' Heb. xiii. 5. 'Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness,' Isa. xli. 10.—'For the Lord will not cast off for ever: but though he cause grief, yet will he have compassion according to the multitude of his mercies. For he doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men,' Lam. iii. 31—33.

"Is all that in the Bible?" asked Martha.

Mrs. Eggleton found her out the different passages, together with many more full of sweet comfort. The word of God abounds with such to the believer. The voice of Jesus rises above the storm—"It is I; be not afraid." "Deep calleth unto deep at the noise of thy waterspouts," said the psalmist; "all thy waves and thy billows are gone over me. Yet the Lord will command his lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night his song shall be with me, and my prayer unto the God of my life," Psa. xlii. 7, 8. "Why art thou cast down, O my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? Hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him, who is the health of my countenance, and my God" (ver. 11).

How sweet it is to be able to look up to Jesus as the source, the loving source, of all our joys and sorrows! Now, for a season, if need be, we are in heaviness through

manifold trials ; but we know that "all things work together for good to them that love God ;" that the furnace of affliction through which we may be called upon to pass, is heated not to consume but to purify ; that though our earthly pathway may be dark and rugged, and full of thorns, still it is "the right way." What if the journey be a sad and toilsome one—we shall soon be at home, "Weeping may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning." A little while, and we shall hear a loving voice saying unto us, "Come up hither ! Fear not, poor, weak, trembling believer, I am the way, the truth, and the life." Well may the question be asked in that day—the great and terrible day of the Lord—"What are these which are arrayed in white robes ? and whence came they ? ... These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple : and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more ; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters : and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes," Rev. vii. 13—17.

CHAPTER XVII.

MARTHA did not feel her father's desertion half so much as she would have done if her mind had not been wholly engrossed with the thought of Willie's death. All other troubles seemed as nothing compared with this. The dream of her young life was ended; her idol lay broken. The one love which she had said was all the world to her was passed away for ever. But God's love remained; nothing can separate us from that. Tribulation and sorrow only serve to make the Saviour more precious. Therefore it is that God sends affliction.

Through the medium of a benevolent lady, to whom Mrs. Egleton had spoken about Martha, a situation was procured for her as nursemaid in a respectable family, residing at some distance from her native village, and where her early history was unknown. It was settled that she should remove thither as soon as she was able to travel, the lady kindly promising to defray her expenses. Martha was thankful for the opportunity thus afforded her of once more earning her own living, and was now very anxious for recovery to health.

"How good of Mrs. Howel to wait for me!" said she.

"Yes," answered Ruth, "it is very kind.

I have been thinking, Martha, that perhaps it would be better to tell her all."

"About the muslin you mean. Oh, Ruth, she would never believe me; even my own father does not. Some day perhaps I may find courage, but not now, not at first."

"Mrs. Howel's friend thinks as you do," answered Ruth, "that it is better not to say anything."

"Does she? I am so glad. I do not believe I could bear to be watched about, and looked upon as a thief, as I should be, even if they were to consent to take me."

"It must be very terrible," said Ruth.

"Terrible indeed! If Mrs. Turnbull, or any of the girls, should ask where I am gone, do not tell them please. But I dare say they will not take the trouble to inquire after me. The very first money I earn shall go to pay for the muslin, and then—but no, money can never repay all your kindness to me."

"We do not want to be paid, dear. We only want to hear that you are well and happy."

Martha shook her head. "I shall never be happy any more," said she, "now Willie is dead."

"Hush, you must not say that; you are still very young, Martha dear; some day the real thief will be found out, and then they will all be sorry for having doubted you,

and your father will receive and love you again."

"God forgive me if I wrong her," said Martha; "but I cannot help believing that he would have received me long ago if it had not been for my stepmother, and that it is she who is keeping us asunder. But I cannot blame her when I remember all the provocations she has had. She would have loved me once if I had let her. It is all my own fault. Afterwards, when she had driven poor Willie from his home, she again wanted to be friends with me, and I promised him to try and forgive her, but I never could—to be sure, I never tried. I seemed to hate her worse than ever. It is a terrible thing to hate any one as I hated her."

"But you do not hate her now?"

"No;" replied Martha, "the Bible says that we must love our enemies. I have been thinking a great deal about it lately; and although all the bitterness that was in my heart against her has passed away, I am afraid I can never love her as I do you and your dear mother, for instance."

"I do not think it means quite that," said Ruth; "only that we should not bear malice, but be ready to do them all the good in our power. Here is the passage in the fifth chapter of St. Matthew's gospel, the forty-fourth and forty-fifth verses."

"I wish I could find out what I wanted

as quickly as you do," said Martha, with a sigh.

"So you will one of these days. Shall I read it to you? 'But I say unto you,' Jesus says, 'Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven: for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.'"

"God knows," said Martha, humbly, "that I have no right to judge or hate any one, and I hope I never shall again. Some day, perhaps, when my stepmother grows old or is ill, I may be able to nurse and take care of her—if she will let me, that is. She will be sorry about Willie. I remember telling her the very day he left, that if anything happened to him it would be all her doing. I wish I had not said it now, for it was not quite true. From a child Willie loved the sea, and he used to say that if it were not for me, he should like nothing better than to be a sailor. Dear Willie, we little thought then how it would end."

"Hush, do not cry; do not think of it, dear, or you will be ill again."

"I cannot help thinking of it," replied Martha. Waking and sleeping, he is ever in

my thoughts. What a death was his ! How fearfully sudden ! ”

“ Death has no terrors for the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ,” replied her companion, while her own tears fell fast.

“ Every one loved him,” sobbed Martha. “ Oh, Ruth, if you had but known Willie ! ”

“ I almost feel as if I had,” replied the girl.

“ That is because I used to be always talking about him. I sometimes fear that I loved him too much. And yet, surely it was natural. He was my own, only brother. He was everything to me. Do you think that was why God took him ? ”

“ I do not know,” replied Ruth ; “ I never thought of it in that light. If so, it was in love.”

“ I can say it all now,” exclaimed Martha, after a pause — “ all that beautiful prayer. There were two parts that tried me sorely. ‘ Thy will be done,’ and, ‘ Forgive us our sins ; for we also forgive every one that is indebted to us.’ But I can say it all now—blessed be His holy name ! There is a verse somewhere in St. Matthew, I think, which is very sweet when one can say it from the heart—‘ Even so, Father : for so it seemed good in thy sight.’ ”

“ Yes,” said Ruth, “ it is very sweet. You will find it towards the end of the eleventh chapter. Here it is at the twenty-

sixth verse. Let me mark it for you, for I intend giving you this Bible when you go away, to keep in remembrance of me."

"As if I could ever forget you! I shall love and value it so much. But what will you do without it?"

"I can use my mother's for the present," answered Ruth. "I thought it would be a comfort to you."

"So it will—the greatest of comforts. How good of you, dear Ruth, to give it to me."

A few days after the above conversation, the medical man who had kindly and gratuitously attended Martha throughout her long illness—for there is more kindness in the world than some people think—told Mrs. Eggleton that all she now wanted was change of air, and that the sooner she left D—the better. The money which her father sent her had already been laid out in the purchase of a black dress, and some neat caps; and her little box was soon packed. But now that the time had really arrived for her to go, Mrs. Eggleton and Ruth could scarcely make up their minds to part with her, for they already loved her as a daughter and a sister. We always love those to whom we have been kind. Martha was sorry to leave them, but she felt that it was for the best. The day she went, Mrs. Eggleton knelt down, and trustingly commended her to the

care of her heavenly Father ; after which she became more composed.

Most of our readers who have suffered from a long illness, will know what it is to go out for the first time ; but besides the confusion and bewilderment, there was another feeling which made Martha hold down her head, as she walked rapidly through the streets towards the coach-office, and carefully avoid the gaze of the passer by. They met no one they knew but O'Connor, who, perceiving by Martha's boxes that she was going away, shook hands with her, and hoped that she would be a good girl.

When the coach had actually started, Martha felt, as we all feel at such times, as if she had not said half what she wanted, or thanked them half enough for all their kindness to her. They passed through a green and beautiful country ; but the girl saw nothing but Ruth's pale, smiling face. Again and again her whispered " God bless you ! " fell soothingly on her ear, until, fatigued by the fresh air and the rapid motion, a mist came over her senses, and she sank into a quiet sleep.

CHAPTER XVIII.

As the coach drove up to the lodge gates, Martha's heart sank within her at the thought of going among strangers. Mrs. Browne, the housekeeper, was struck by the sight of her pale face, and deep mourning dress; and taking the trembling girl kindly by the hand, she led her into her own little room, and made her sit down by the fire while she made her some tea, after drinking which, she advised Martha to go to bed at once, in order that she might feel rested by the morning.

"You must try and get well as fast as you can," said she, "for Mrs. Howel is not one to spare her servants. I cannot think what made her wait for you so long, unless it was to oblige the lady who recommended you so highly. It was very unlike her."

Martha thanked her new friend, and said that she dare say she should soon be strong again, for the doctor had told her that she only wanted change of air.

"And good living," added Mrs. Browne. "How thin you are, child!"

"I am stouter than I was," replied Martha, showing her poor faded arms.

"Well, go to bed now. There is not much for you to do, or I am afraid that you would not be able to undertake it."



MRS. BROWN AND MARTHA.

"I am stronger than you think," said Martha, eagerly. "Indeed, indeed I am."

"We shall see. Come to me to-morrow morning, and I will tell you what you will be expected to do. But I am forgetting that you do not know your way about yet."

The worthy housekeeper lighted a candle as she spoke, and went rustling up stairs before Martha, in her stiff black silk dress, and snow-white cap and mittens, looking as if she had just stepped out of an old picture. Not that Martha knew anything about old pictures. She only thought of her kind smile and gentle voice, and felt almost sure that she should be very happy at the Grange—that is, as happy as she could ever hope to be now Willie was dead.

The benevolent doctor was right; all Martha wanted was change of air, and, as Mrs. Browne wisely added, good living, which she took care that she should have. She had taken quite a liking to the poor girl, although she was careful to conceal it, for fear of drawing upon her the ill-will of her fellow-servants.

Mrs. Howel professed herself much pleased with Martha's appearance, and the children soon learned to love her. One of them was named Willie, and Martha's heart clung to the child. Sometimes she used to relate little histories to them, but they were generally about the sea, except on Sundays,

when she took them from the Bible. Joseph and his brethren was the favourite; and the children never seemed to be weary of hearing it repeated. One day, after she had been telling them some sea-stories, little Willie declared that when he grew up, he was determined to be a sailor, and nothing else.

"Oh, master Willie," exclaimed Martha, "you must not say that."

"Why not?" asked the boy.

"Because I had a dear brother, once, who thought as you do. But it is all my fault for putting it into your head."

"Tell me about your brother," said the child. "What was his name?"

"Willie."

"How strange! And did he go to sea after all?"

"Yes," replied Martha, "he went, but never came back again."

Willie put his little arms round her neck; while the rest of the children gathered round them with their young hearts full of love and sympathy.

"Poor Martha!" said the eldest, "that is the reason why you look so pale, and always wear mourning."

"How did it happen?" questioned Willie, in a low voice. "But do not tell me if it pains you."

"No," replied Martha, "it does not pain me. I like to tell about him. There is little

to tell. One dark, stormy night he fell overboard and was drowned." And, looking up, she added, as if thinking aloud—"Willie is in heaven."

The boy pondered over her last words.

"How do you know that he is in heaven?" asked he.

"Because he loved and believed in the Lord Jesus Christ."

"I should like to go to heaven when I die," said Willie, thoughtfully.

Martha recollected reading somewhere in the Bible, that our Saviour had said, "Suffer the little children to come unto me, and forbid them not," and that "he took them up in his arms, put his hands upon them, and blessed them;" and she told Willie so, wishing that she had Ruth by her to find the exact place. It is very useful to be able to turn at once to the passages we want; and much may be done by attention and practice. From that day Martha frequently spoke to the children about this good and gracious Saviour, and always with deep reverence, and humble prayer; but she never told them any more sea-stories.

Mrs. Howel was careful that all her servants should have the opportunity of attending public worship at least once, and as many of them as could twice, on the sabbath day. If they did not choose to go, she used to say it was not her fault. Martha thankfully availed herself of the privilege thus afforded

her. Every morning and evening she read a chapter in her little Bible. She was beginning to feel very peaceful and happy. Some of the servants laughed at her, and called her a methodist; but they were not unkind.

The lady's maid was the only one who seemed to have taken a dislike to her, being jealous perhaps of Mrs. Howel's injudicious praises. But Martha took pains to please her; and was so civil and obliging that she ceased, at length, to find fault. Sometimes when the children were in bed, she used to ask her to sit down and help her to work, which Martha was always willing to do; and as she worked well and quickly, she was glad of her assistance; until one unfortunate day when Mrs. Browne happened to observe, that if Martha took care she would make an excellent lady's maid: "You only want a knowledge of hair-dressing," said she.

Martha smiled, and answered, that she was very well contented to remain as she was. But Mrs. Elton, or Elton, as she was generally called, never forgot those words. From that time she became her bitter enemy, and was always fancying that Martha wanted her to be turned away, in order that she might supply her place, although nothing was further from the girl's thoughts.

It was a happy day for Martha, when she was at length enabled to send Mrs. Turnbull the amount of what she had taken. Nothing

could exceed the dressmaker's surprise on receiving it.

"I do believe," said she, "that the poor girl was innocent after all."

Ruth had gone away; and there was no one with her now who had known Martha, but Ann Lawrence; and she only shook her head.

"The girl is more artful than I took her to be," said she.

"Then you really think that she stole the other things?"

"Who else could?"

"To be sure there was no one else. But somehow I cannot believe it. I am glad that I did not proceed against her."

Martha longed to be a little bird, and follow her parcel to Mrs. Turnbull's. It was well that she could not. She also forwarded a small sum to Mrs. Egleton, together with a few grateful and heartfelt lines.

"Poor child," said that kind friend, when she received it; "she may want it some day." So she put it by for her, and wrote a long letter, full of affectionate encouragement, in which she told her that they were going to move; but as soon as they were settled in their new abode she should hear from them again.

"I never saw a girl so much improved as Martha Owen," observed Mrs. Howel, one day while Elton was dressing her hair.

"Do you think so, ma'am?"

"Yes, she is positively growing pretty."

"Handsome is that handsome does," murmured Elton.

"And what has poor Martha done?"

"I do not want to make mischief," replied the lady's maid, who had in truth nothing to tell; "But I must confess I never liked that girl, and never shall."

Mrs. Howel perceived that her attendant was out of temper about something, and said no more. She was right in thinking Martha altered. Few would have believed that it could have been the same pale sickly girl, so feeble as to be scarcely able to walk up that avenue along which she might now be seen bounding after the children, full of health and cheerfulness. A dozen times a day Martha paused to thank God for all his undeserved goodness. "If my father would but forgive me," thought she, "I do believe I should have nothing left to wish for."

Poor Martha, her troubles were not yet over.

CHAPTER XIX.

Mrs. HOWEL had frequently noticed and praised Martha's skill in making the children's dresses, and one day when Elton was ill, and she wanted several of her own

dresses altered in a hurry, being about to leave town, she requested that she would remain and help the young person whom she had desired might be sent to her for that purpose, and see that they were finished off, and ready for packing in proper time. Martha cheerfully prepared to do her best; and telling the children that she would not be absent longer than she could help, went immediately to Mrs. Howel's room, where the dressmaker had already arrived. A faint cry burst from her lips when she saw Charlotte Dendy.

"What, Martha Owen!" exclaimed the young girl, in whose mind there still rankled many a bitter recollection of old times, and old provocations, when they had worked together at D—. "Well to be sure! I did not even know that you were out of prison."

Elton, who was lying down in the adjoining apartment, arose quietly at these words, and went to summon her mistress.

"Oh, Charlotte," exclaimed Martha, clasping her hands wildly together; "do not betray me. I am so happy here. I was innocent, indeed I was. I never took anything but the muslin; and Mrs. Turnbull has the money for it. I know that I used to try you all a great deal with my proud, impatient temper, but I am very sorry for it now."

"Well, well, say no more about it," replied Charlotte, touched by her changed

manner. "I promise to keep your secret. I too have left the old place in the hope of bettering myself. But it is a weary life to be working from morning till night. I have not been in bed for above a couple of hours at a time for the last week."

"Poor thing; how tired you must be. But let me help you now," said Martha, sitting down and beginning to work, although her hands trembled so that she could scarcely hold the needle.

"Silly child!" exclaimed her companion, laughing; "you will not do much at this rate. Have I not promised that I will not say a word to injure you?"

"Yes; thank you—bless you for it. And if I can be of any service to you in return I shall be so glad."

"You could not lend me a few shillings, could you?" asked Charlotte, colouring with shame as she spoke; but she was very poor.

"To be sure I can. I will go for it directly." Mrs. Howel and the lady's maid met her at the door; and Martha knew by their countenances that all was discovered.

"And so you would bribe this young woman into keeping your secret," said the former.

"No, indeed, I did not mean it as a bribe. Charlotte knows that."

"Will you tell us what you do know?"

asked Mrs. Howel, turning to the dress-maker.

"Pardon me, ma'am, if I refuse," was the firm reply.

"Nay, tell her, Charlotte; perhaps it will be best."

"Not I. I am sorry that I came here at all to get you into trouble and disgrace: you have had trouble enough without that." And the poor girl covered her face with her hands, and burst into tears.

"Never mind," said Martha, soothingly; "it cannot be helped. It is my own fault for not telling the truth at first. But I am ready to tell it now, ma'am, if you please."

Mrs. Howel sat down with an air of manifest impatience. She was thinking of her intended journey, and the delay thus occasioned in the necessary preparations that ought to have been going on. Elton leaned pale and trembling on the back of her mistress' chair, for she was in truth far from well. Martha's simple history was soon related.

"And did my friend know this when she recommended you so highly?" asked Mrs. Howard.

"Yes, ma'am, she knew everything."

"Well, it is a strange story altogether. I do not mean to say but what it may be true. I hope it is, for your own sake; but under any circumstances it is quite evident that you

are by no means a fit person to be trusted with the care of children. And although Mrs. Elton will not positively affirm that she has missed anything since you came, it is very unpleasant to have a servant in the house whose honesty is, at best, questionable."

It was in vain that Martha even knelt to her stern mistress, imploring not to be cast forth homeless and friendless upon the world; that she would only try her, or at least give her time. But Mrs. Howel had no time to spare, and she thought that she acted generously in paying the girl a little more than was due to her, and dismissing her at once.

"Mercy, mercy!" exclaimed Martha, clinging to her. "I have no home—nowhere to go to. My father will not receive me, and Willie is dead. I have tried so hard to do right—indeed I have. Oh, Elton, speak a good word for me." The lady's maid turned away her head. "Mrs. Howel, you are a mother—mercy for your children's sake, lest they also should one day supplicate in vain."

"My children will never be thieves!" replied her mistress, pale with anger.

"And why is this?" asked Charlotte Dendy, with flashing eyes. "Only because their wealth will shield them from the thousand temptations of hunger and poverty.

We are all born with the same feelings, but we are not all tried alike. Come, Martha, let us go. I have brought this trouble upon you, and we will bear it together. Mrs. Elton can accompany us to your room and see that we take nothing."

Martha went with them mechanically, feeling as if her heart would break.

"I am sorry to see you so ill," said she to Elton, while Charlotte was pressing into her box the different things which lay scattered about. "I hope you will soon be better."

"Thank you," replied the lady's maid, in a low voice. Just then Charlotte called her to see that nothing had been taken but what belonged to Martha.

"I dare say it is all right," said Elton.

"You had better look," replied the girl, with an air of careless impertinence; "we are not to be trusted, you know."

"Oh, Charlotte!" exclaimed Martha, reprovingly.

"I cannot help it. I have no patience with such a hard-hearted, unfeeling set. But it will come home to them one of these days. Now, Martha, if you are ready, I am. I think we can manage to carry the box; it is not very heavy."

Martha turned back to wish Elton good bye.

"I suppose I must not see the dear children," said she.

"I do not think that Mrs. Howel would like it."

"Well, perhaps it is best not;" and she turned away, weeping bitterly. Just as they reached the last flight of stairs, carrying the box between them, Martha heard the rustling of Mrs. Brown's stiff silk dress, and drawing Charlotte back, they waited until she had gone into her own room and shut the door. It was a pity she did that, as the worthy housekeeper might have stood her friend; but the poor girl felt ashamed to meet her.

After quitting the house, they walked on for some time in silence. Martha's heart was too full to speak, and her companion was thinking what was best to be done. Presently they stopped to rest, and Charlotte saw that Martha was weeping.

"Don't cry," said she, "I cannot bear to see you, and to know that it is all my fault."

"But you did not intend to injure me?"

"I am not so sure of that. You were never a favourite with any of us at Mrs. Turnbull's."

"Neither did I deserve to be. But where are we going, Charlotte?"

"First of all, to a friend of mine who lets lodgings cheaper than any one else; and you must remain there until I see if I cannot get you into our establishment. They pay

higher than Mrs. Turnbull used, but there is more work to be done."

"I am strong now," said Martha, "and do not care how hard I work."

"If I am not able to come to you for a day or two you must not mind. But I will send word, if I can, how things are going on. Only I must try and get back time enough to make up a story before they hear from Mrs. Howel. It would be a terrible thing if I am turned away."

"Surely they will not do that."

"I hope not; but Mrs. Howel is a good customer, and must not be offended. But I will out-wit her yet. You need not look so pale, Martha; I flatter myself that they know my value too well to part with me. How much money have you?"

Martha told her.

"Capital! why you are quite rich. You can afford to wait a week or two until I can manage to get you in. And now, if you are rested, we had better go on."

Charlotte's friend lived at the further end of the town, in a row of mean-looking houses, facing a dead wall; and from the entrance of which Martha involuntarily shrank back.

"Come," said Charlotte, cheerfully. "You cannot expect to find a house like the Grange."

"But it looks so dirty."

"Never mind. You will have nothing else to do for the next few days but clean it. The room is wonderfully cheap, and my friend Mrs. Orger not uncivil—as long as she gets her money. Suppose we pay her a little in advance to put her in good temper. Shall we?"

"As you please," replied Martha, placing her purse in the hands of her companion.

Charlotte took what she wanted, and returned it hastily.

"You had better keep it yourself," said she. "I am not fit to be trusted with money."

The necessary arrangements were soon completed; and Charlotte, having kissed Martha affectionately, and bid her keep up her spirits and hope for better times, hurried back to her employers.

CHAPTER XX.

MARTHA followed Charlotte's advice, and busied herself until it grew dusk in making her little room as clean and comfortable as she could; after which she sat down by the fireless hearth, with a shawl over her shoulders to keep her warm, for it was a chill autumn evening, and began to think. She would have written to Mrs. Eggleton,

but she did not know where to address the letter. The future appeared very dark, and her heart sank within her, until she turned for comfort to her little Bible, and began to read and pray. Presently the door opened, and Charlotte came in with a bonnet-box in her hand."

"You did not expect to see me so soon," said she, with a light laugh; "but you can guess the reason, I suppose."

"Yes," answered Martha, "I am afraid I can. Oh, Charlotte, what shall we do?"

"We must do the best we are able. There are more dressmakers than one in the place; and more ways of earning a living than toiling from morning till night, as I have done of late. It is enough to kill a horse! Do not fret about it, Martha; see, I have brought home something nice for supper."

"Would it not have been better to have saved the money, Charlotte dear? We may want it."

"Perhaps it would. I did not think of that. Never mind, let us eat and be merry while we can. I suppose you lived famously at the Grange?"

"Yes," answered Martha, "there was always plenty to eat and drink."

"It must be a fine thing to be rich," said Charlotte. "But I think one ought to have been poor first, in order that one might be able to feel for others. What were you reading

when I came in? Have you any amusing books?"

"Only the book of books," replied Martha, holding up the Bible.

"In that case," said Charlotte, "we may as well go to bed."

"Shall I read you a chapter first?"

"No, thank you. I am not a hypocrite. I have given over reading the Bible long ago."

"Begin again, Charlotte dear. You cannot think what a comfort it is."

"It would not comfort me."

"Why not?" asked Martha.

"Because I am too wicked!"

"So I thought of myself once."

"You have grown good, I suppose, since then."

"No, indeed, Charlotte. And it is because I so deeply feel my own sinfulness, and because the whole Bible is so full of Christ, my Saviour, that it has become so precious to me."

"Well, I am glad that you have something to comfort you. And now, do not say another word, for I am tired to death, and determined for once to have a long night's rest."

"I may say good night, Charlotte, may I not?" asked Martha, gently.

"Yes; good night. I did not speak unkindly to you, did I?"

"No," said Martha, kissing her.

"How changed she is," thought Charlotte. "I wonder whether it is reading the Bible. I am sure I wish that something would change me—but it is too late now."

The following day, and for many days and weeks, the two girls sought in vain for employment, until their little stock of money was at length exhausted; and then Martha took out her dresses, one after another, and even her warm winter cloak, and gave them to Charlotte, who sold them in order to pay the rent and provide their scanty meals—all her own things had been sold long ago. They were often foot-sore and hungry, and Charlotte grew fretful and impatient; but poor Martha endeavoured not to complain.

One day, as she was sitting on a door-step to rest, a gentleman came out, and taking her for a beggar, threw a sixpence into her lap, and passed on. Martha's first impulse was to run after him and return it, but she thought how glad Charlotte would be with something for supper, so she thanked God, and put it into her pocket. Presently another gentleman came out and ordered her away.

"It is a shame," said he, "for a great, strong girl like you to be begging."

"I did not beg, sir," replied Martha. "I would willingly do anything to earn an honest living, but no one will employ me."

getting to thank God for it; and then hastily tied on her bonnet. She wondered that Charlotte did not offer to see her off, little thinking that the poor girl had pawned the only shawl she had in order to procure the unexpected meal of which she had just partaken. Few words were exchanged at parting; they could only weep, and kiss one another, and hope for better days.

Martha found Mrs. Orger at the foot of the stairs, waiting to shake hands with her, which she did very kindly, wishing her a pleasant journey, and giving her a bag of cakes to eat going along. Martha thanked her, and was turning away, when she called her back to say that if she sent any money she had better forward it straight to her, as Charlotte would be sure not to give it to her.

“Never fear,” replied Martha; “I will take care of that.” She hurried on until she came to the place where the coach stopped, and found that she was above half an hour too early. It seems a little thing to be half an hour too early or too late; but it often makes a great difference nevertheless.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHILE Martha was waiting for the coach, she was suddenly addressed by a familiar voice, and turning round beheld her old friend, Mrs. Browne.

"I thought it was you," exclaimed the worthy housekeeper. "But how changed—how sadly changed! What have you been doing with yourself, my poor child? I have searched everywhere I could think of for you."

"You are very kind," said Martha; "you always were to me."

"And yet you went away without letting me know. But I am not going to scold you. Tell me what brings you here."

Martha said that she was waiting for the coach to go to D——. Mrs. Browne, spoke to one of the men at the office, where she was well known, desiring that they might be told as soon as it came round; and took the girl into the waiting room, where there was a nice fire burning, and everything very snug and comfortable. They were quite alone, and Martha, at her request, briefly related the touching history of all her trials and sorrows, and was believed and pitied. Mrs. Browne told her in return that a letter arrived only a few days after she left; and since then some one had been to inquire

after her who appeared to be very anxious, and was disappointed at not being able to gain any intelligence of her. He did not say who he was, and no one asked him, she not being at home at the time.

"It must have been O'Connor," said Martha, turning pale.

"Whoever it was," replied Mrs. Browne, "I do not think he meant you any harm. I understand that he seemed quite indignant, and refused to believe a word of the cruel story that was told him. And now, my child, we have only a few minutes to spare. Here is my address. If your father still refuses to receive you, write to me at once, and I will see what can be done. In the mean time, you may want a little money," added she, pressing her purse, containing a small sum, into Martha's hand. "Nay, you must not refuse me. Is there anything else that I can do for you?"

"Oh, yes; if you would," exclaimed Martha, eagerly. "I should like to send poor Charlotte something—may I?"

"Tell me where she lives."

Martha did so, and was about to divide the contents of the purse she had just received, when Mrs. Browne stopped her.

"Keep your money, dear child, and trust to me. I will take care of her for your sake. Hark!" added she, interrupting Martha's broken and inarticulate thanks;

"there is the horn. They will be here directly. God bless and watch over you. You shall never want a friend as long as I am alive."

As she spoke, the coach came rattling up the street, and the guard looked in to beg that Martha would take her place at once, as they only waited a few moments.

"We must not forget the luggage," exclaimed Mrs. Browne. "Where are your boxes? I do not remember seeing any. And your cloak? You cannot travel in this manner."

"I have no luggage," replied the girl, in a low voice; "I have nothing left but this." And she showed Mrs. Browne the little Bible hidden under her thin shawl.

Before she could speak the guard had hurried Martha away; and a few moments afterwards she was comfortably seated in the only vacant place, beside an old farmer and his wife. The latter, seeing how pale she looked, and how poorly clad, lent her an old woollen shawl to wrap round her. "Thee 'll find it cold presently," said she, "when we begin to move." Martha thanked her gratefully, and then looking at Mrs. Browne, pointed to it with a bright smile. "Every one is kind to me," thought she. "God is very good." The housekeeper's eyes were dim with tears, but she wiped them hastily away; and her cheerful greeting was th-

last thing Martha saw as the coach drove away.

Thanks to the old woollen shawl, Martha did not feel the cold so much as she would otherwise have done. In the middle of the day, when they stopped to change horses, she was glad enough of her little bag of cakes, to which the good farmer would insist upon adding a substantial-looking sandwich, together with some home-brewed ale, which he took out of a large leathern flask.

When they arrived at D —, Martha took off the shawl, and returned it with many thanks. The woman was sorry that she could not let her keep it, especially as the day was closing in, but Martha told her that she should soon get warm by walking.

"Have you far to go?" asked the farmer.

"Three miles," replied Martha. "I shall get there before dark, if I make haste. And having paid her fare, and given something to the coachman, as was customary, although the man hardly liked to take it from her, she walked quickly on.

"I wish you had given her the shawl, dame," said the old farmer to his wife.

"So I would, with a right good will—but it belonged to our poor Mary, who is dead and gone."

Late as it was, Martha determined to proceed at once, without waiting to inquire after the Egletons. She went by the field

path because it was a little nearer, but it was very bleak and lonely. The wind moaned and whistled among the leafless trees, and every now and then a sudden gust arose which threatened to carry away her frail bonnet, and made her shiver from head to foot. As she approached nearer home, every spot seemed to have a memory and a history. There was the old parish church, with the fading sunset lighting up its ivy-clad windows, and glittering on the tall, slender spire. There too, lay the silent grave-yard, in which her dear mother was buried.

On she went, past the entrance of the wood, where she and Willie had so often gone nutting and blackberrying, and played, and gathered flowers in the long summer days. There was the bright murmuring stream by the banks of which the brother and sister used to wander together, and where little Susan had been so nearly drowned. The recollection of that terrible night came back as vividly as though it had only just happened. "If she had died then," thought Martha, "no one would ever have believed but what I pushed her in. Dear Susan! I wonder whether she has forgotten me."

She stood a moment leaning over the old wooden bridge, and listening to the voice of the past, speaking to her of by-gone days. Her heart swelled with gratitude when she

thought of her own sins and provocations, and of God's long forbearance, and tender mercy. And as she stood thus, she prayed that he would be graciously pleased to incline her father's heart towards her, if it were his will; and if not, to grant her strength of mind and body to bear up against so great a disappointment. She felt glad that she could still say—"Thy will be done."

The stars came out one by one, and shone down into the quiet water. How often had Martha and Willie stood hand in hand, watching them in childish wonder! and now Willie was above the stars, singing the new song in heaven.

Martha's head failed her when she came in sight of the cottage where she was born. "What if my father should still refuse to forgive me?" thought she. The light of a cheerful fire danced and flickered on the low uncurtained window. Martha held back the withered branches which grew before it and looked in. She saw her father sitting opposite in his old arm chair; an open book lay before him, but he was not reading. His bowed head rested upon his hands, and his hair was as white as snow. A little girl sat at his feet looking dreamily into the fire. Presently she turned and spoke, and as he lifted up his face to reply, Martha uttered a faint cry to perceive how changed it was.

"This is my doing!" exclaimed she. "God

be merciful to me a sinner, for Jesus Christ's sake."

After a pause she again looked in at the cottage window in order to ascertain that her stepmother was still absent. "If I can only see him before she returns," thought the poor girl, as she went round and knocked timidly at the door.

"Come in!" exclaimed a childish voice. Martha lifted the latch, and stood trembling on the threshold, while Susan looked at her without knowing her again.

"Who is it?" asked Mr. Owen feebly. "Why do they not come in? Is there any news of my poor Martha?"

The girl knew by the tones of his voice that he had forgiven her, and in another moment she was in her father's arms, with her head resting upon his bosom.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WE shall not attempt to describe their reconciliation. After a time, Martha lifted up her head from her father's bosom, and murmured in a low voice, as she glanced fearfully round the room, "What will she say?"

Mr. Owen knew who his daughter meant, and drawing her closer to him, whispered

that she was dead. There was a long pause, broken only by the deep sobs of poor Susan. Martha knelt down beside her, and did all she could to soothe and comfort her. After a little while the child became more composed, and went of her own accord to make her sister a nice cup of hot tea, of which she was very glad.

It was not until Martha removed her bonnet, and sat down by the light of the blazing fire, that her father perceived how changed she was.

"What has become of all your beautiful hair?" asked he.

"It was obliged to be cut off," replied Martha, "when I had the fever."

"The fever!—Ah, I remember now, Mrs. Eggleton telling me about it. Why did you not send for me, my poor child?"

"I did write twice,—but—"

"Yes, she told me that too. I never received any letter: they were kept from me."

"Is it possible?" exclaimed Martha; and then meeting Susan's earnest glance, she paused abruptly.

"Forgive her," whispered the child.

"There is nothing to forgive," replied Martha, soothingly, "I only am to blame. Your poor mother was very kind to me once, and would have continued so, but for my own proud and wilful temper. It was all my own fault."

"Dear sister, how I love you!" said Susan, clinging to her.

"To be sure you do. There—do not cry any more, darling. Let me put you to bed—may I?"

"Yes, I should like it," replied the child, "for I am very tired. You will look after father to-night."

"Not only to-night, but every night, I hope," exclaimed Martha, giving him an affectionate kiss as she passed.

When they were gone, the old man bowed his head upon his clasped hands and returned thanks to God.

After Susan had retired, they conversed together more freely. Mr. Owen told Martha how grieved and angry he had been at her silence, and how, for a little while, he was persuaded into believing all the evil that was told him; how he tried to forget her, but could not; and had made up his mind to go to D—— in search of her, when the sudden intelligence of poor Willie's death drove everything else from his thoughts. A serious illness followed, from which he was only just recovering, when Mrs. Owen was brought home one day in a fit, and died the next evening without being able to utter a word, although she made several ineffectual attempts to do so.

"Never," said Mr. Owen, "shall I forget the agonized expression of her countenance

as she lingered thus. I have no doubt but what she would have told me everything then if she had been able. Two or three times she held me down until my ear was close to her lips, but no sound came—she never spoke again.”

“Poor thing!” exclaimed Martha, with tears in her eyes.

“She was never the same woman after Willie died,” continued Mr. Owen. “Many a time, when I lay ill in bed, I have heard her walking up and down the room, talking and moaning to herself. God forgive her! She remembered, perhaps, that but for her the poor boy would not have left his home.”

After a pause, Mr. Owen went on telling her how, when it was all over, he had gone to D——, resolved to find out his daughter, and bring her home. The first place he went to was Mrs. Turnbull’s, who grew pale upon hearing what he had come for.

“Poor girl!” exclaimed she. “God only knows where she is now. If anything happens to her it will be all my fault, for believing the wicked stories that were told me of her.”

“Then it is not true about her having robbed you,” said Mr. Owen.

“No, it is not. She only took the muslin, as she said, and has since re-paid me for it. It was Ann Lawrence who stole the other things.”

When her father came to this part of the story, Martha could not help uttering an irrepressible cry of joy. The old man smiled upon her, but his eyes were full of tears.

Mrs. Turnbull gave him the address of the Egletons, from whom he learned all the particulars of Martha's long illness, and how she had written to him in vain, and gone away believing that he had cast her off for ever. Tired as he was, Mr. Owen started at once for the Grange, where he was somewhat abruptly informed that Martha had been dismissed from the house in disgrace, and no one knew anything about her. He lay ill at a little roadside inn for many days, and then, after a few vain inquiries, returned almost heart-broken to his desolate home.

When he had ceased speaking, Martha related, at his request, all that had happened since they parted, passing lightly over those parts of her sorrowful history which seemed likely to give him pain; and dwelling gratefully upon the many acts of kindness which she had received. "It was God," said she, "who put it into their hearts to be so good to me. Blessed be his holy name for having restored us once more to one another!"

"Amen!" said Mr. Owen, solemnly.

"You were reading before I came in, were you not?" asked Martha, pointing to the old Bible which lay upon the table before him—her mother's Bible, as they used to call it.

"I was trying to read—I have often tried since poor Willie's death. He used to say so much about it in his letters. But I am no scholar, and my thoughts wander sadly."

"May I read to you?" asked Martha.

"I shall be glad if you will," replied her father. "And not only to-night, dear child, but every night and morning. Nothing has gone right since we left off having family prayer."

Martha was pleased to hear him speak thus. How many old recollections came crowding back as she took the well remembered book in her hands. It seemed to open of itself at the hundred and seventh psalm, as it well might, for Mr. Owen seldom read any other after Willie went to sea. What a beautiful psalm it is! Martha wept as she read it, but they were tears of joy. The commencement appeared to be especially suited to her own case—at least she thought so.

"They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way; they found no city to dwell in. Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses. And he led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation. Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!"

The following day Martha wrote to Mrs. Browne, enclosing money enough to pay Mrs. Orger the rent that was owing, and enable poor Charlotte to live comfortably until she should be able to arrange something for her. She also called upon the Egletons and Mrs. Turnbull. The latter was delighted to see her, and offered to double the salary she used to receive if she would only return to her again; but Martha declined leaving her father. She found Ruth about to be married to a respectable farmer living in the neighbourhood, and a very happy day they had together; after which the young farmer drove her home in his covered cart. Susan and her father stood at the door looking out for her. How sweet it is to be thus watched and waited for! How thankful ought those to be who have a home and loving friends and kindred, when so many in the world are homeless and friendless!

Mrs. Browne wrote affectionately to Martha, congratulating her on her changed prospects; and telling her that she had removed Charlotte from Mrs. Orger's and placed her with a sister of her own, who would take every care of her. She was sorry to say that the poor girl's health appeared to be in a very declining state, but she trusted that the change of air would prove beneficial. Martha had often heard Mrs. Browne speak of this sister; and knowing her to be an humble

and faithful follower of the Lord Jesus Christ, she prayed that Charlotte's residence with her might be blessed.

And now we have little more to relate. Every sabbath day Mr. Owen might be seen leaning on the arm of his eldest daughter, with little Susan on the other side of him, crossing the green fields to the house of God. The neighbours said that he looked at least ten years younger since Martha had come home. They were very happy together and very thankful, as the happy should always remember to be. As far as their means went, Martha did a great deal of good among the poor. She had known what it is to be hungry, and sorrowful, and tempted; and it made her pitiful towards others. Above all, Martha had known what it is to have no hope, and to be without God in the world. And she was never weary of repeating those beautiful invitations and promises contained in the Scriptures, which had been such a comfort to her own sin-burdened soul: "Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest," Matt. xi. 28. "Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out," John vi. 37.

"There is no peace, no rest, no real happiness," she used to say, "until we have come to Jesus."

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